

The mixed memories of a novice bullwhacker

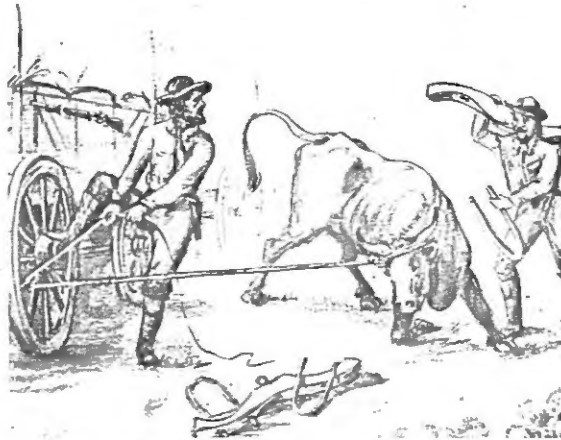
One of the least likely bullwhackers ever to drive a freight wagon across the plains was William Henry Jackson, a polished 23-year-old New Englander who would later win fame as a painter, photographer and memoirist of the frontier. In 1866, after a quarrel with his sweetheart, Jackson hired on with a wagon train outbound from Nebraska City, figuring to forget his sorrows and at the same time see the country. On the nearly six-month-long journey to Salt Lake City, he kept a diary and made a series of sketches on which he based the scenes shown here.

"I have never used profane language," Jackson confided to the diary, "but since I have commenced driving Bulls I have gone somewhat astray." That was not surprising, considering his first attempt to yoke 12 half-wild longhorns: he spent eight hours wrestling them into submission.

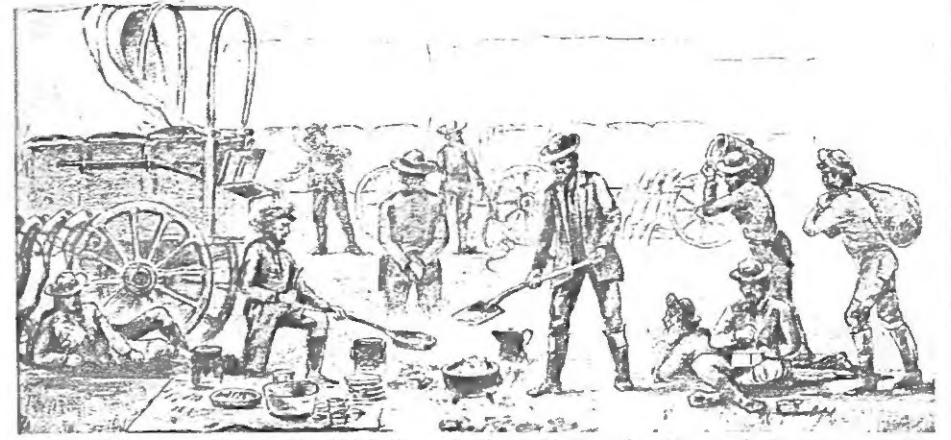
After a few weeks, he got the knack of yoking and driving, but the aggravations of the bullwhacker's life seemed to be endless. "What we have drunk in the way of water would astonish a person used to pure water," Jackson wrote. Of one of the many assaults of Western weather, he solemnly observed: "An Eastern person has hardly an idea of a thunder storm."

By the time he reached Salt Lake City, Jackson had mellowed into a true bullwhacker. His hands were callused, he had a scraggly beard, and he simultaneously wore two pairs of trousers whose rips were luckily located in different places. "Taken as a whole," he concluded with ill-concealed pride, "you have a very seedy individual."

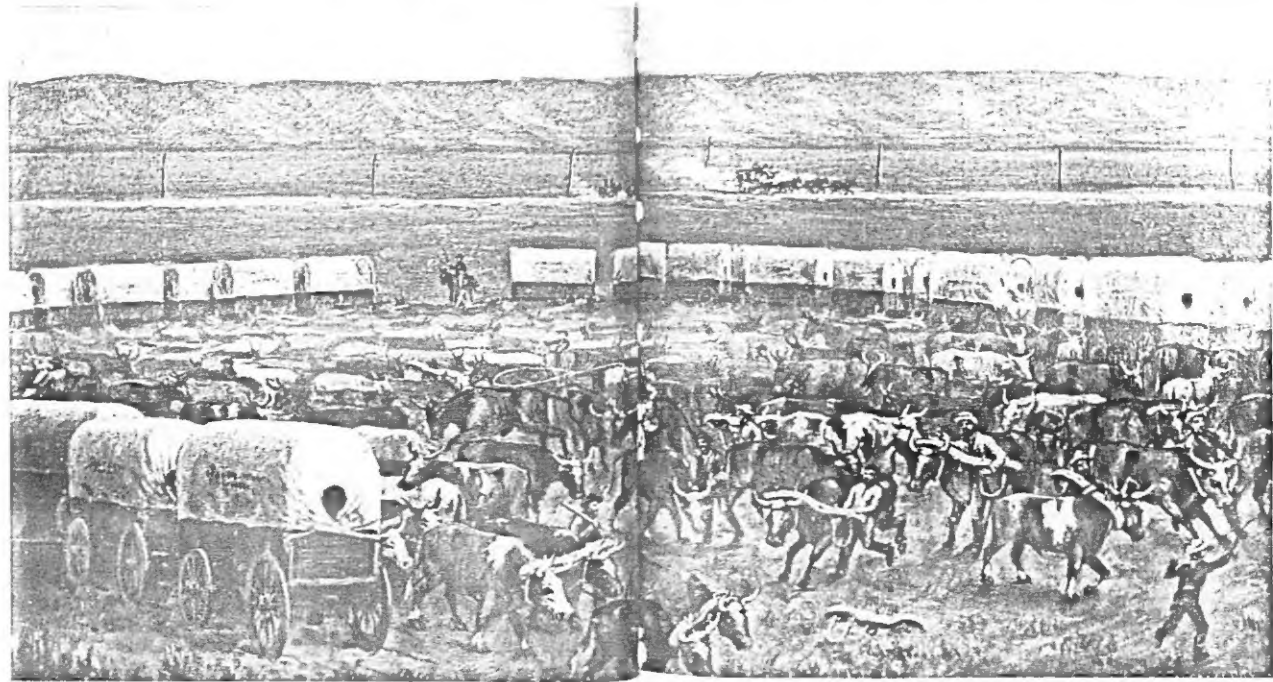
Bullwhackers begin the day by yoking oxen in a wagon corral. Jackson was initiated into the process by being "thrown head over heels and stepped on most plentifully."



A belligerent bull, lassoed and secured to a wagon wheel, angrily awaits the yoke.



While one teamster fuels a campfire with bull chips, another fries a panful of bacon that, with bread and coffee, will serve as breakfast.



Jackson's self-portrait with his whip.

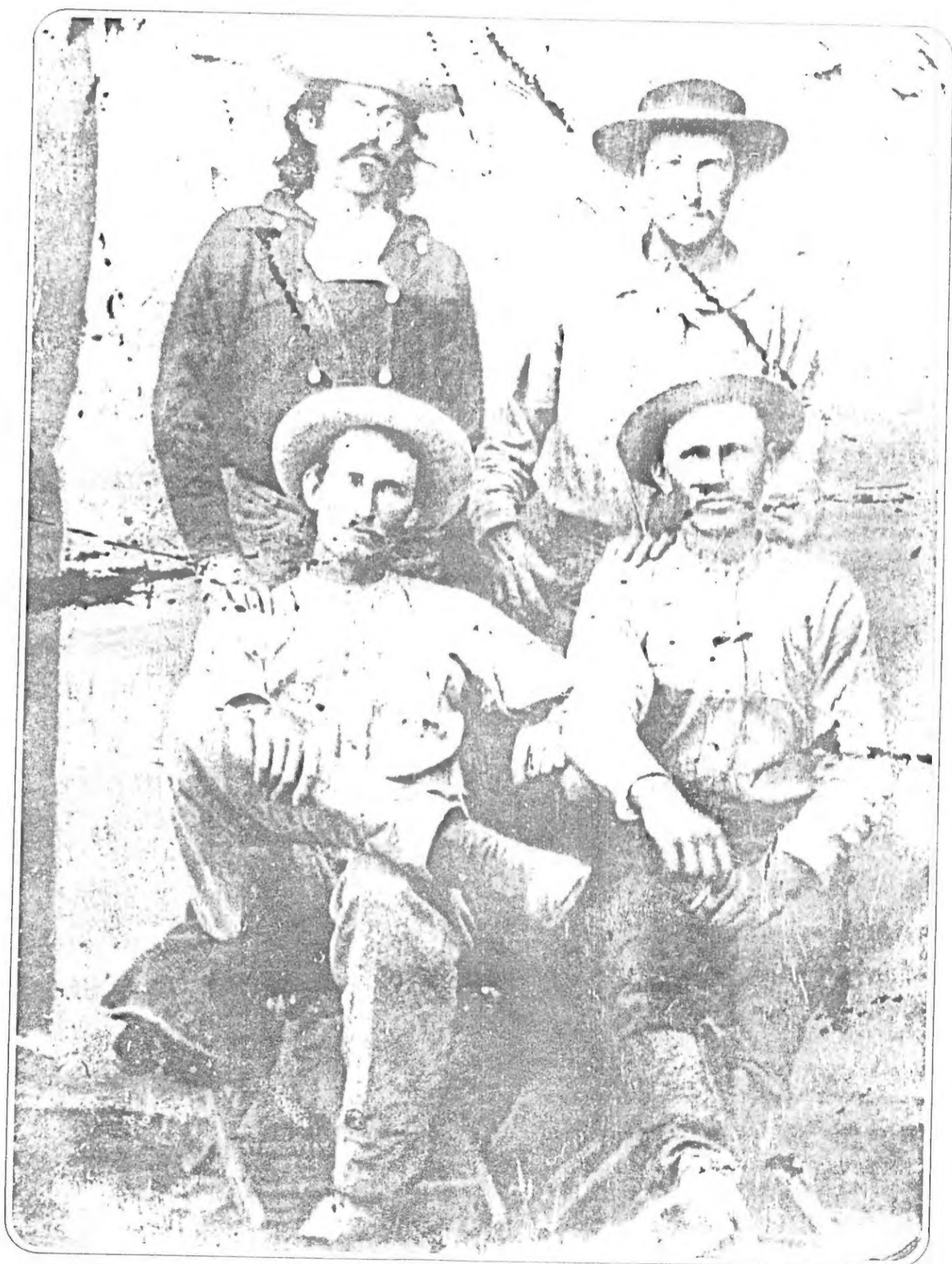
3 | The fabled Pony Express

For a year and a half, from April 1860 on, Americans east and west thrilled to the exploits of an elite band of daring horsemen who sped the mail across the wildest miles of the continent, between Missouri and California, on a punishing timetable of 10 days flat. Along with letters, the Pony Express carried important financial and government documents. Even Great Britain's Royal Navy relied on the service: its China fleet communicated with London via

San Francisco and the Pony Express. In their brief period of glory the Express riders transported 34,753 pieces of mail and pounded out a total mileage equal to 24 times around the globe. Only one man fell into the hands of Indians, and his horse escaped and finished the run on its own. By the end of 1861, telegraph wires had spanned the continent, and with the suddenness of a rider reining in for a change of mounts, the Pony Express era came to a halt.



By a scalping margin, a Pony Expressman on a fleet mustang outran a classic Indian band in this painting by artist H. W. Hamer.



A wild-eyed mount and exhausted rider battle snow and winds to cross the Sierra between Nevada and California. In winter this 85-mile stretch became the worst obstacle of the whole 1,966-mile Pony route.



W. H. H. H. H.
1900

A Sacramento River paddle steamer completes the last leg of the Pony Express route to San Francisco. On the first Express run, rider William Hamilton trotted his horse aboard so that he could deliver his packet personally in the city. Later relay riders entrusted their saddlebags to the skipper.

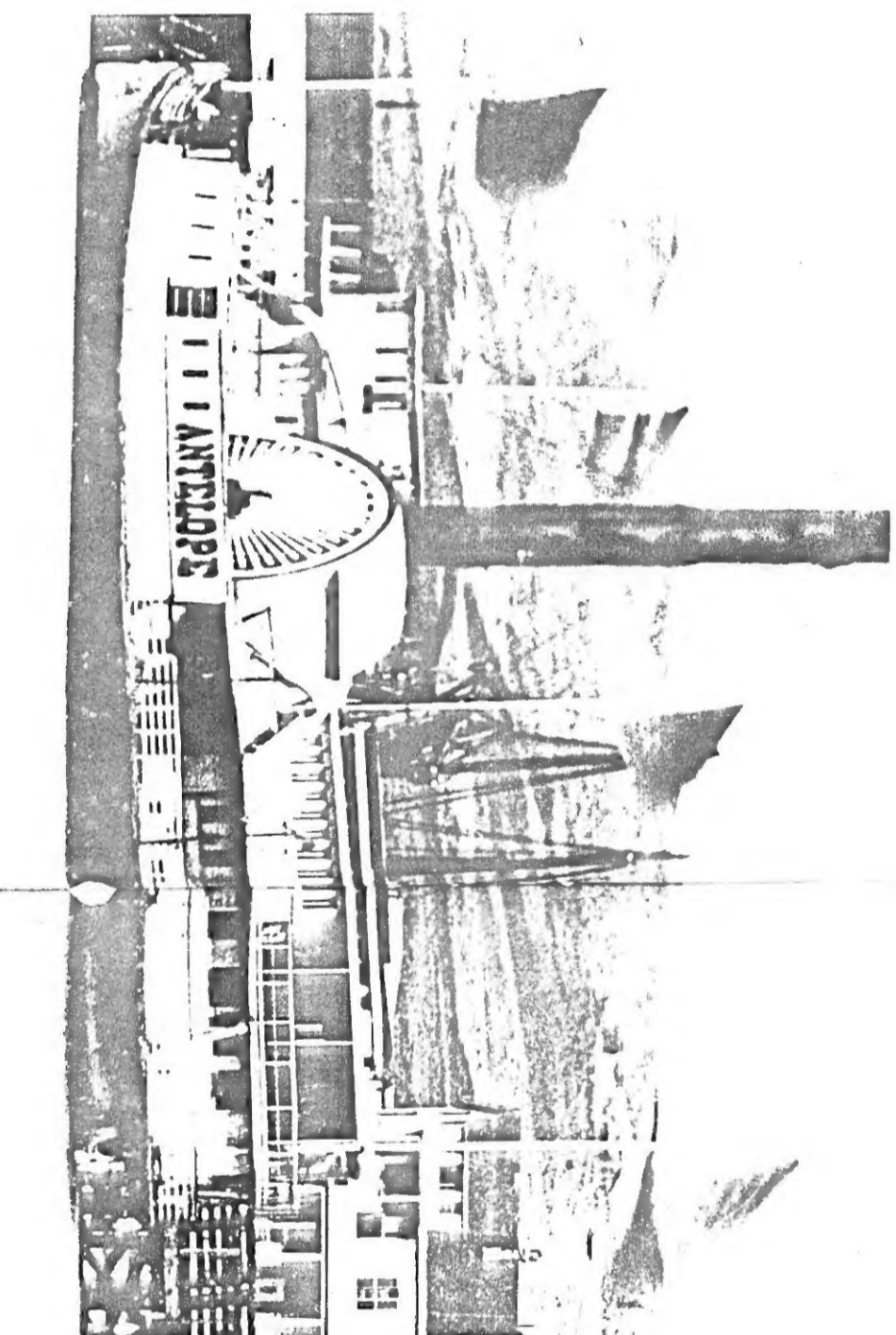


table Hippogriff [the winged horse of fable] who shoved a continent behind his hoofs so easily; who snuffed up sandy plains, sent lakes and mountains, prairies and forests, whizzing behind him, like one great river."

By the time San Francisco started celebrating, the last eastbound relay had reached St. Joseph and set off another outburst of rejoicing there. To be sure, some of the riders had been held up in the Sierra Nevada by an unusually fierce blizzard that piled up 30-foot drifts, but riders farther along made up the lost time. And already two more mails were on their way from the opposite ends of the route. It looked as though William Russell had a winner.

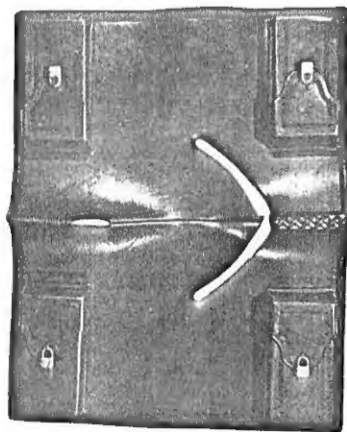
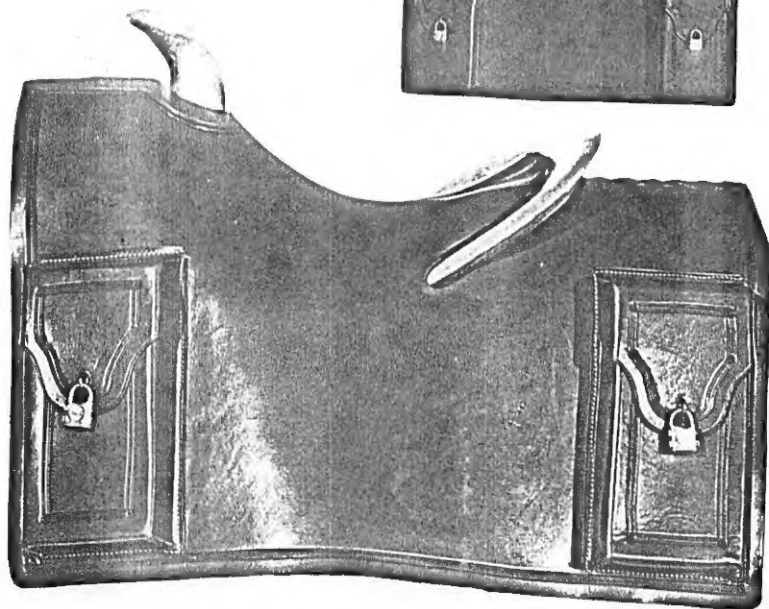
Newspapers everywhere, even in Europe, were unstinting in their praise. The paper that offered the sweetest music to Russell's ears was *Denver's Rocky Mountain News*, which combined acclaim for the Pony with a blunt attack on the Southern opponents of its route. "The Express Company deserves great credit," said the editorial, "for concentrating public attention on the central route, and it is hoped that their enterprise will shame Congress into legislation in favor of the opening of a daily or tri-weekly mail route to Denver, Utah and California."

As far as Russell was concerned, government action could not come too soon, for he was in dire financial straits. Russell's troubles—and the idea for the Pony Express—dated back to the winter of 1857-1858 and the Army's disastrous campaign in Utah to quell Mormon defiance of federal authority. In freighting the Army's supplies, Russell, Majors & Wadswell had incurred losses of \$493,000. When the firm demanded compensation, the War Department declared that it had overdrawn its 1857 appropriation and could make no payment whatsoever. The company's credit, up to then virtually unlimited, was gravely impaired; it was never, in fact, to be repaid for its losses in Utah, on the further ground that no formal agreement had been drawn up for this special supply assignment.

Still, the Utah debacle had yielded one very useful bit of information. The two men in charge of the wagon trains—Russell's nephew, Charles R. Morehead Jr., and a former Army captain named James Ruge—had returned to the firm's Leavenworth headquarters under abominable weather conditions, but nevertheless had made the trip with remarkable ease. As Morehead sum-

SPECIAL SADDLERY FOR HIGH SPEED

The unique lightweight saddle kit shown in replica below was designed especially for the Pony Express—reportedly by one of its riders, W. A. Cates. The entire assembly weighed less than 15 pounds, or about one third as much as an ordinary Western saddle. Over the stripped-down saddle went a leather rectangle (right) called a *mochila* (Spanish for knapsack) with four mail pouches called *cantinas*, and cutouts that fit around the pommel and cantle of the saddle. The *mochila* could be yanked off one horse and thrown across another in well under the two minutes allotted in the Pony Express schedules for a rider's change of mounts.

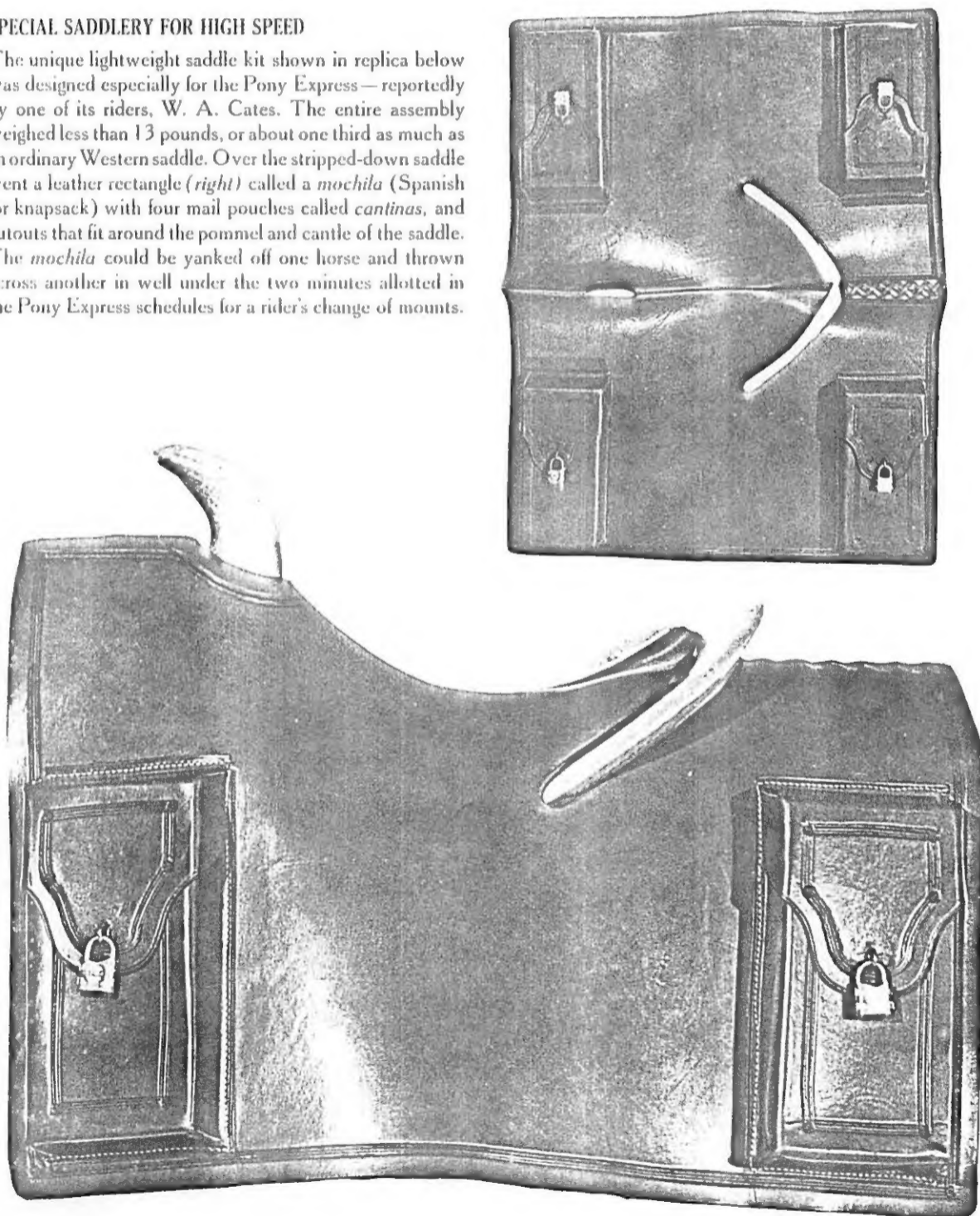


human: he ended his ride as Buffalo Bill Cody, the most famous of all, claimed—somewhat less than both Haslam and Kettley were in or out of the saddle. Cody, who sold, Majors & Waddell as a boy, the age of 10, was hired for a mail striping at 15. He was on the run between Red Butte and Three Crossings on the braska. After completing his Three Crossings, Cody had been killed the night before; no replacement was available more to the next home state passed on the westbound bound mail to take all the. Cody recalled the episode with the usual rapidity, on time, and accomplished without a single mishap. of this trip was 384 miles lam's. Cody boasted that being the longest Pony 1. But he did not report his Buffalo Bill, the renowned and his stories were known uncanny marksmanship.

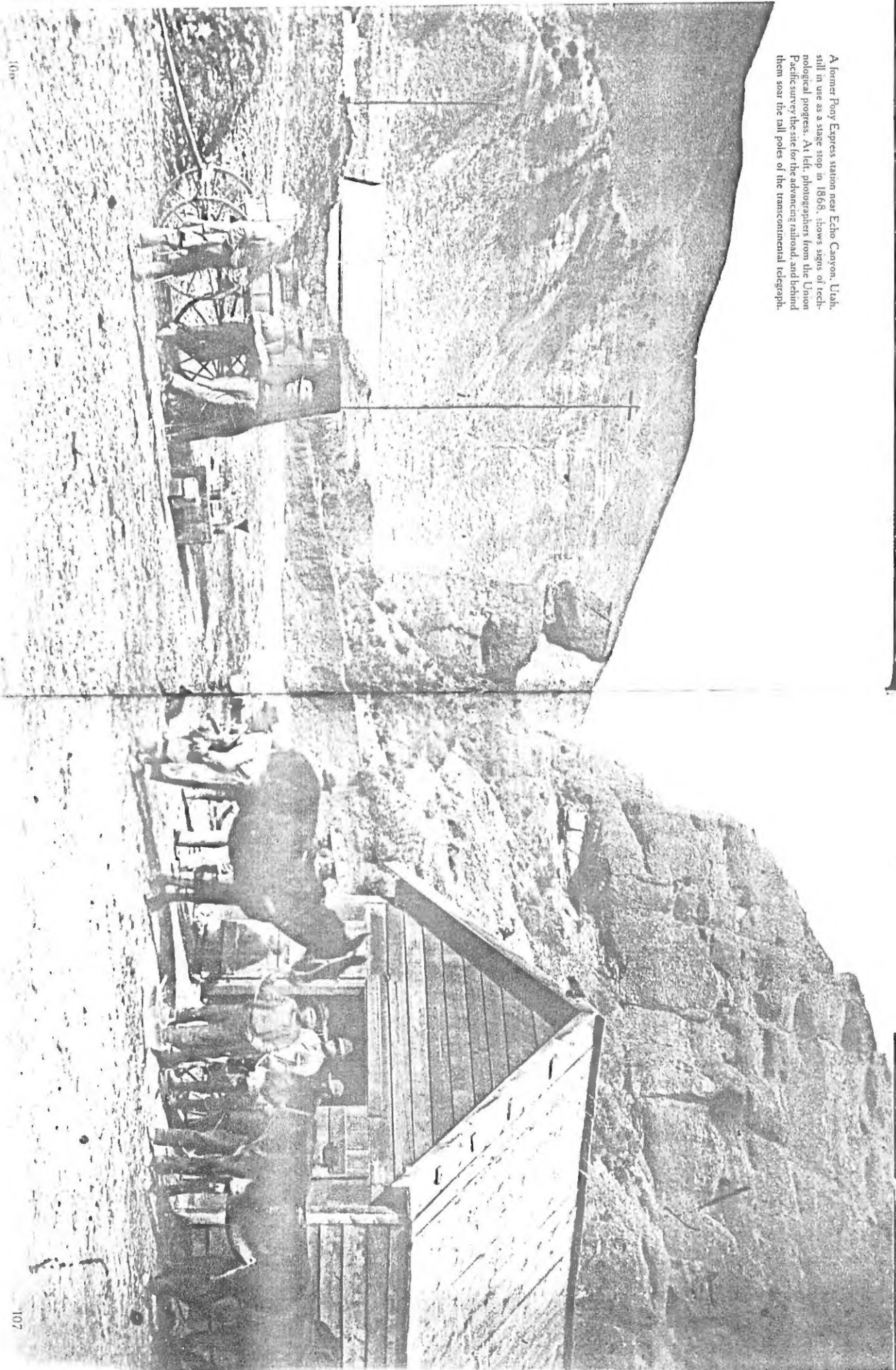
Through the summer performance—and acclaim—the Pony Express was a of pleasure. Things were worse throughout his shapetation of a big mail spent so lavishly on coach that the line was losing uphaps events would prove there were other grave Majors & Waddell. 11 1860 freighting business of the year before; thousands of oxen hauled the partners learned belatedly for a large part of other freighting companies Army was slow in see-

SPECIAL SADDLERY FOR HIGH SPEED

The unique lightweight saddle kit shown in replica below was designed especially for the Pony Express—reportedly by one of its riders, W. A. Cates. The entire assembly weighed less than 13 pounds, or about one third as much as an ordinary Western saddle. Over the stripped-down saddle went a leather rectangle (right) called a *mochila* (Spanish for knapsack) with four mail pouches called *cantinas*, and cutouts that fit around the pommel and cantle of the saddle. The *mochila* could be yanked off one horse and thrown across another in well under the two minutes allotted in the Pony Express schedules for a rider's change of mounts.



A former Pony Express station near Echo Canyon, Utah, still in use as a stage stop in 1868, shows signs of technological progress. At left, photographers from the Union Pacific survey the site for the advancing railroad, and behind them soar the tall poles of the transcontinental telegraph.



English fans of the Pony Express enjoyed this 1861 *Illustrated London News* sketch despite its errors. The rider is much too portly; his rifle should be a pistol, and the bulging mail sack a flat-lying *mochila*.



row, not to steal, the bonds. The two men were indeed scrupulous about exchanging bonds and acceptances. When bonds worth \$870,000 were found to be missing in December 1860, vouchers in exactly the same amount balanced them out. But this fact was to prove a pitifully weak defense against numerous accusations of wrongdoing.

On December 24, Russell was arrested in his New York office on three charges of receiving stolen property and one charge of conspiring to defraud the government. He was shipped to Washington and clapped into jail. Bail was set at \$500,000, a figure that outraged Russell because Bailey, arrested on three charges of theft, was released on only \$5,000 bail. Russell's friends in the East raised \$300,000, and his friends out West rallied to his defense with pledges of two million dollars in securities. After a few days in jail, he was released on reduced bail of \$300,000.

In January of 1861, the House of Representatives set up a Select Committee to investigate the whole mal-

odorous mess. In hearings that went on through February, 46 witnesses were examined and cross-examined. Russell testified on four occasions: he was alternately evasive and frank, and frequently confused as to dates and sums of money involved.

The Select Committee, having weighed the huge mass of contradictory testimony, then produced a report. One of its conclusions was that Secretary of War Floyd, who had since resigned and fled to Virginia—by then a state of the Confederacy—had illegally approved acceptances not only from Russell but from several other businessmen. The report also noted that President Buchanan had known of and forbidden Floyd's traffic in acceptances, but had not pursued the matter. Another conclusion by the committee was that Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, a second Cabinet member who had resigned under fire, was guilty of "neglect" in guarding the stolen Indian bonds.

Bailey, who had confessed his crime, was never brought to trial; he avoided summonses until the whole

The month blood flowed across the Pony's path

Only once in the history of the Pony Express did the mail not go through. That was in May 1860 during the Paiute War, a clash whose principal hero was a peace-loving Indian.

Some 6,000 Paiutes in Nevada had suffered a winter of fierce blizzards, "freezing and starving to death by scores," according to a Carson City paper. The Paiutes blamed their woes on the white man, who committed such acts as hacking down trees from which the Indians gathered nuts. By spring, the whole tribe was spoiling for war—except a chief named Numaga. For three days Numaga fasted and argued for peace. But on May 7 a few hotheads stole away and raided the Williams Station of the Pony Express, killing five men.

Over the next weeks other isolated whites in Paiute country were ambushed and slaughtered. The Pony Express was a special target: in all, seven of its relay stations were razed, 16 employees were killed and 150 horses were driven off.

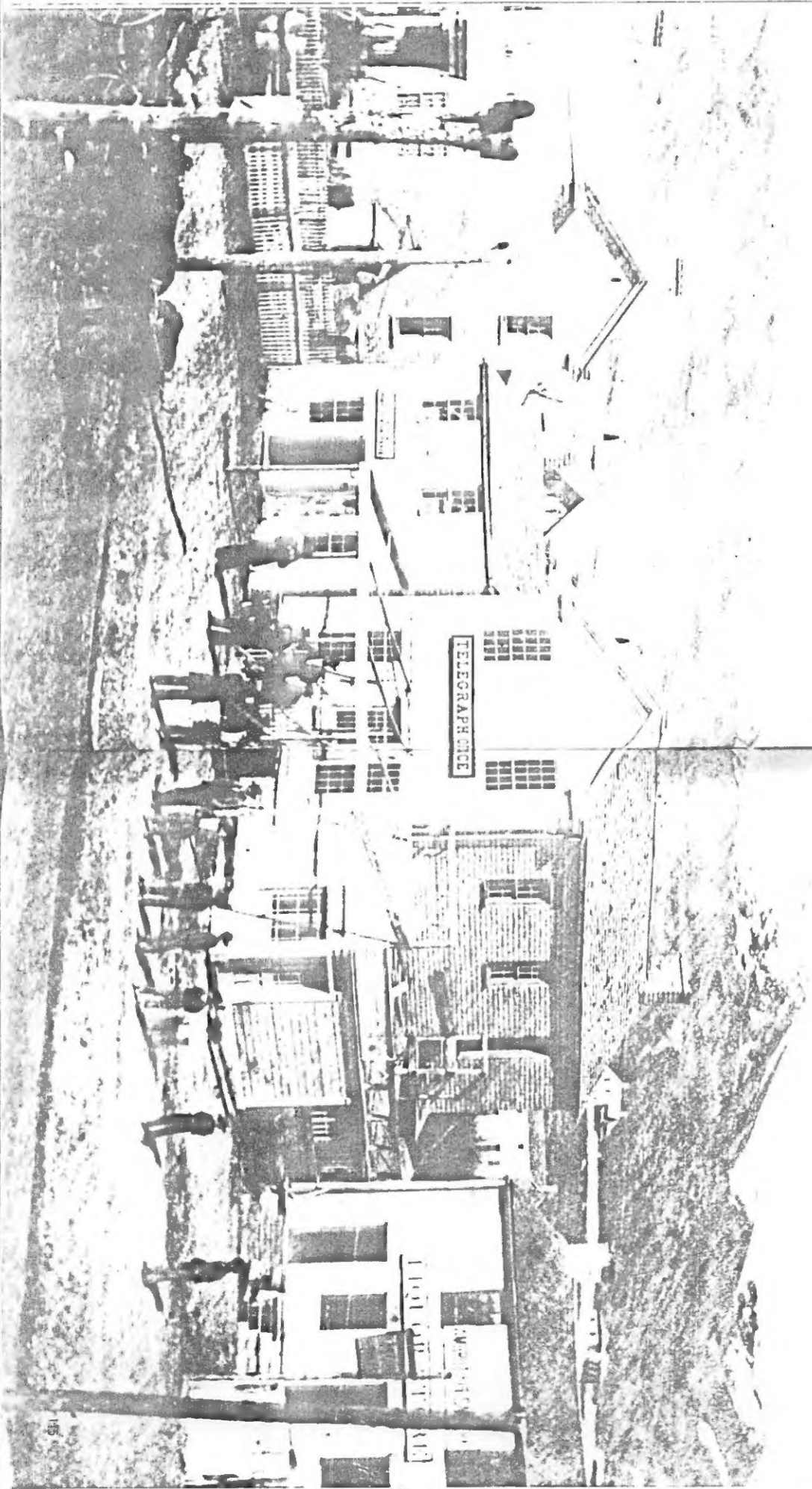
Through all this, Chief Numaga tried to restrain his tribesmen. One day, when Paiute warriors decoyed a pursuing party of whites into ambush, Numaga burst out of the Indian lines waving a white handkerchief, hoping to make peace on the spot. The whites' response was to open fire, and a pitched battle ensued.

By early June the Army accomplished what Numaga could not: an end to the war that had taken more than 75 lives. The Pony resumed operations; as for Numaga, he resumed leadership of his people, a chieftain whose wisdom stood sadly confirmed.



Paiute chief Numaga holds a symbol of the waring spirit he tried to control in his tribesmen.

Telegraph lines strung from East and West met in 1861 at this Western Union office in Salt Lake City. Though the telegraph was incomparably faster than Pony Express, rates were so high—as much as 75 cents a word—that frugal spenders had special cause to mourn the Pony's passing.



A proud band of men who rode into history



THE PONY EXPRESS WAS THE FIRST WESTERN MAIL SERVICE. IT WAS RUN BY A TEAM OF MEN WHO RODE INTO HISTORY.

They were special and they knew it. The self-assurance in the faces of the Pony Expressmen pictured on these and the following pages reflects a certainty that they did a demanding job, and did it well. Many, though young, had already proved themselves as bullwhackers or broncobusters before signing on with the Pony. "They were looking for something exciting," said Bill Cates of his fellow couriers, "and the Pony was just what they wanted."

Charley Cliff called his occupation "the loneliest kind of a job" and William Campbell admitted "it was strenuous work at any time." But the challenges rarely fazed the Pony Ex-

pressmen. Richard Erasmus Egan once rode 330 miles, about twice his scheduled distance, simply to oblige another rider who wanted to take time off to visit his sweetheart. These lusty bachelors in their late teens and early twenties snatched romance on the run. The dashing Johnny Fry so charmed the girls along his route that they were said to wait by the wayside to proffer cakes and cookies they had baked just for him. One of these girls, according to legend, invented the doughnut so that Johnny could spare the snack on one finger at full gallop. Fry did not have long to enjoy the adulation. When the Civil War broke

out he enlisted in the Union forces and soon fell a casualty. A number of other ex-Pony riders died young, victims of frontier crime or of vigilante justice. But sturdy physiques sustained many more into ripe old age. Some had successful careers in business, ranching, politics and the professions. Four became Mormon bishops. All of them wore memorabilia of the Pony as proud as medals. Bill Campbell, who had earned the text of Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address westward in his saddlebag, cherished one of the most satisfying memories of all. Every one of his fellow couriers, Campbell recalled, felt that he was "helping to make history."



ON A HOT, JUNE AFTERNOON, 24 HOURS BEFORE

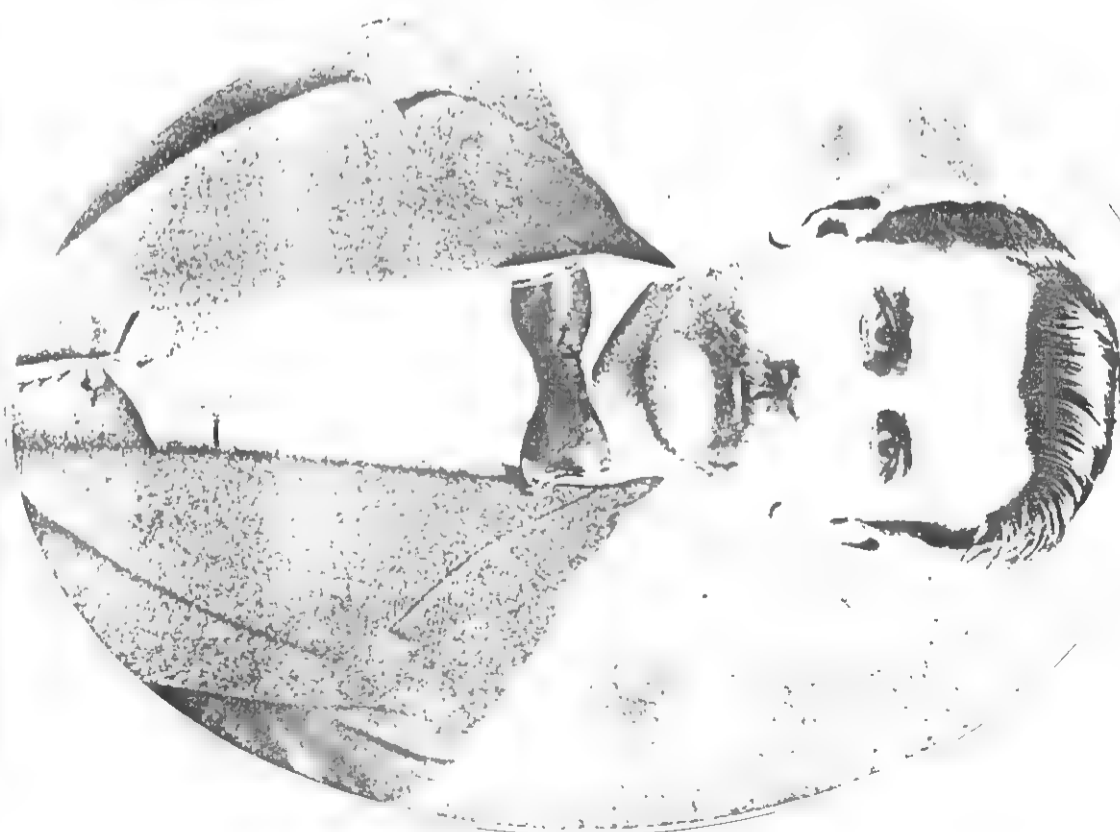


ON A HOT, JUNE AFTERNOON, 24 HOURS BEFORE

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Charles C. Gendron, a "New York" subject, admitted he had been "in contact" with "Mr. [redacted]"



1993 *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 32:1005-1012

1952
 Photo of a young man
 named after a friend of his
 named William C. C. C.
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Richard Ernest Egan a view of Morton survived many close calls with Indians to become a bishop of the church.



Robert James McElroy a picture of a man who served months in the 1930s and 40s as a U.S. Senator.



4 A stagecoach empire

By the 1860s, the stagecoach reigned as the most popular means of carrying people, mail and valuables across the West. But the choice of stage lines was limited: sooner or later, most travelers found themselves paying their fares at offices such as the one at left—one of many in a far-flung stage network owned and imperiously operated by a single individual, Ben Holladay.

For five years, from 1862 through 1866, Holladay enjoyed a virtual monopoly of the eastern half of the cen-

tral overland route, an advantage he maintained by piratical methods against his rivals. Expectably, his critics were many. To Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* he was "a nuisance to be abated by Congress." A competitor branded him "wholly destitute of honesty, morality and common decency." On the other hand, no less respectable a journal than *Harper's Weekly* rated Holladay as "the greatest organizer of transportation the West has produced." Both his critics and admirers were right.

One of Holladay's myriad coaches prepares to depart from his Denver office





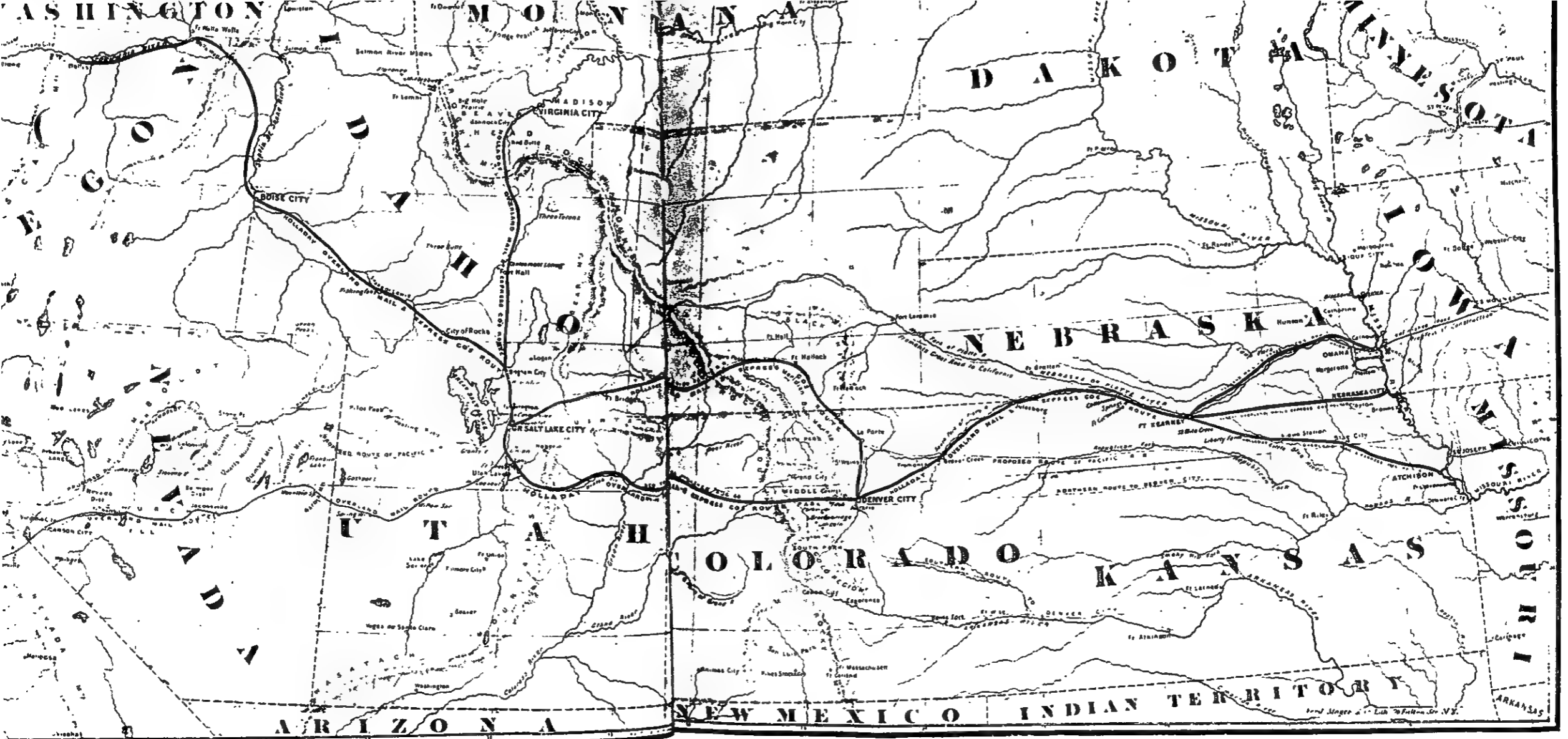
would not have been grievously injured except in pride.

At the time of the holdup, he probably had no precise measure of his net worth, but it was a lot. His Holladay Overland Mail & Express Company (more modestly called the Overland Stage Line during its early years) operated 3,145 miles of stagecoach and freight lines in Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, Oregon, Idaho and Montana. As sole owner, Holladay had at his command 15,000 employees and 20,000 vehicles, including 110 of the world's finest stagecoaches built by the Abbot-Downing Company of Concord, New Hampshire. In his stables and corrals were 150,000 draft animals: oxen, mustangs, durable Missouri mules and swift, magnificently sturdy Morgan horses. The United States Post Office was paying him \$365,000 a year to carry mail on the central overland route; and he was grossing up to \$350 a seat on the run between Atchison, Kansas, and Salt Lake City.

Yet overland transport was only one of Holladay's enterprises. He also owned 16 steamers that plied the Pacific Coast and ventured as far as China. And he owned slaughter houses, grain mills, packing plants, whiskey distilleries, general stores, thousands of acres of land, and gold and silver mines.

A man of such means could afford to indulge his penchant for creature comforts — as well as his wife's yearning for entree into high society — so Holladay also maintained a number of lavish residences. His home at 1131 K Street in northwest Washington, conveniently near the White House, was guarded at the portal by two seven-foot-high bronze lions, purchased in Italy for \$6,000 each. Inside, in addition to crystal chandeliers and old masters, was a library of the classics, beautifully bound but never opened except by maids with feather dusters and an occasional insomniac house guest.

In New York City, Holladay also kept a brownstone mansion on Fifth Avenue, not far from the Wall Street office where he dealt shrewdly with the barons of finance. North of the city, near White Plains, sprawled his premier residence, Ophir Farm — a million-dollar, 200-room palace surrounded by 1,000 acres stocked with deer, antelope and genuine prairie buffalo. Measured against that estate, the first house Holladay



mid-1860s charts the Holladay line's main routes from the Missouri River through Denver to Salt Lake

City, with two Northwest branches. Lighter lines trace Wells Fargo's Salt Lake-California run and the Central Pacific's projected parallel route.

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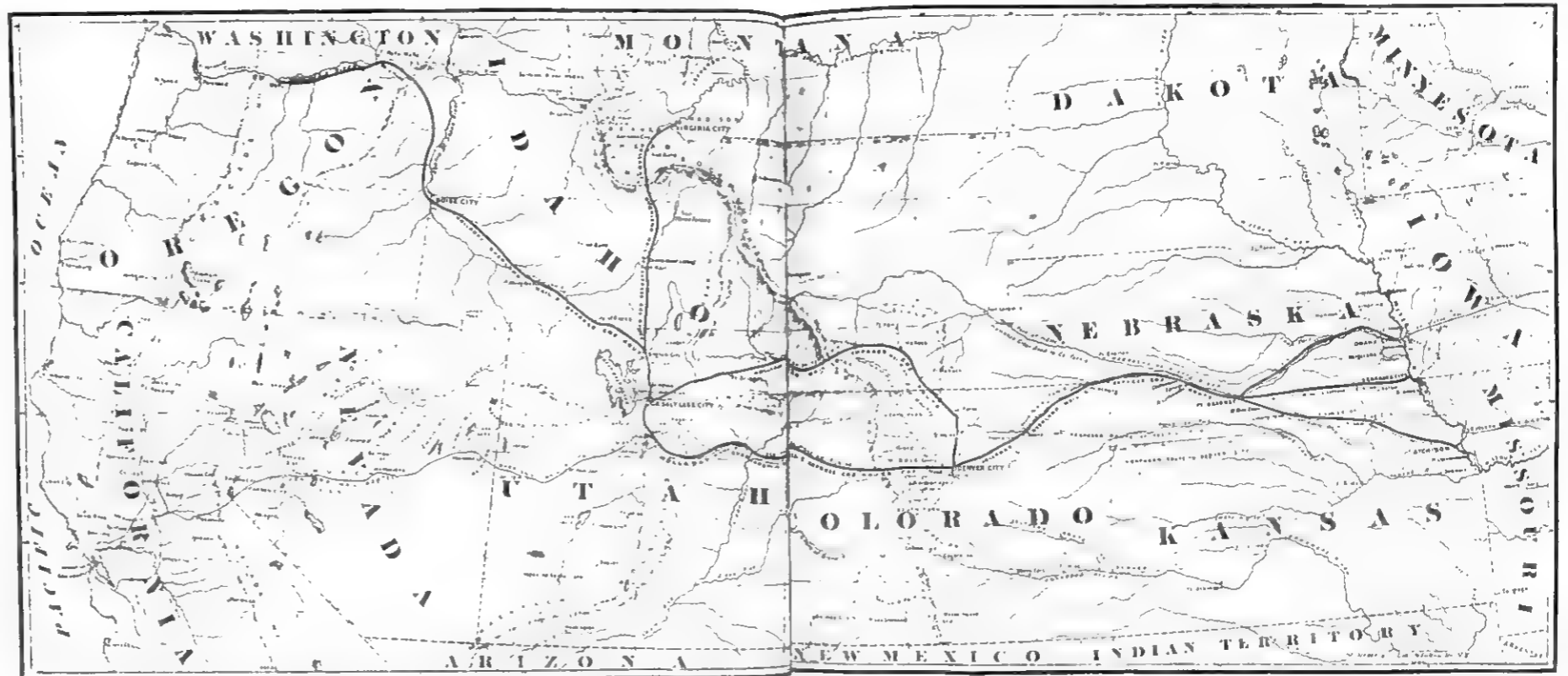
While acquiring these worldly goods, Holladay ingratiated himself with some important, if unlikely, friends. Missouri was then in a ferment of animosity to-

and ordered Colonel Alexander Doniphan to drive the Mormons out of the state. The assignment was a case of spectacularly poor judgment on the Governor's part: Doniphan, a lawyer in civilian life, had represented the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and sympathized with the plight of Smith's followers.

Having sized up Holladay's zest for action, Doniphan made the young man his unofficial courier and sent him on a series of visits to the town of Far West carrying forewarning of the Governor's strategy and ad-

west in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, Holladay would cash in on Young's high regard.

In the meantime, Holladay began to perfect the straightforward philosophy that was to guide him all his life: when a man saw what he wanted, he took it with no more ceremony than necessary. He was 21 when he fell in love with a beautiful red-haired schoolgirl, Ann Notley Calvert. Ann's father was a judge and her mother a woman of great social pretensions. When they objected to Holladay's suit, he borrowed a fast mare.



A transportation map produced in the mid-1860s charts the Holladay line's main routes from the Missouri River through Denver to Salt Lake

City with two Northwest branches. Lighter lines trace Wells Fargo's Salt Lake-California run and the Central Pacific's projected parallel route

mark—a central hallway wide enough so that a Conestoga wagon and a six-horse team could have been driven through it from front door to back.

Ben Holladay owed all this power, pelf and circumstance to himself alone. He was born in 1819, one of seven children of a hardscrabble Kentucky farmer. He grew up sturdy and muscular—topping out finally at six feet two—and conscious of his swarthy good looks. Even as a youth, he was full of fire and soaring ambition, no candidate for the menial striving required by life on a farm. Adventure, he knew, lay westward. At 16 he ran away and found a job in a general store in Weston, across the Missouri River from Fort Leavenworth.

But working for somebody else did not fit Ben's vision of the future. While still in his teens he was running his own tavern, mainly serving explosive frontier whiskey to soldiers from the fort. By the time he was 21 he had a drugstore and a dirt-floored hotel and began sending for his brothers to help him.

While acquiring these worldly goods, Holladay ingratiated himself with some important, if unlikely, friends. Missouri was then in a ferment of animosity toward a group of Mormons who had founded a new town called Far West and who appeared to crave ever more autonomy in their local affairs. Late in 1838, Governor Lillburn Boggs mobilized the state militia

and ordered Colonel Alexander Doniphan to drive the Mormons out of the state. The assignment was a case of spectacularly poor judgment on the Governor's part: Doniphan, a lawyer in civilian life, had represented the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and sympathized with the plight of Smith's followers.

Having sized up Holladay's zest for action, Doniphan made the young man his unofficial courier and sent him on a series of visits to the town of Far West, carrying forewarning of the Governor's strategy and advice for Mormon leader Brigham Young. Young was grateful to Holladay as the bearer of useful intelligence and came to trust him. Years later, 1,200 miles to the

west in the valley of the Great Salt Lake, Holladay would cash in on Young's high regard.

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A local magistrate was waiting to marry the couple.

Six years later, in 1846, Holladay came to grips with the destiny that was to make him master of a transportation empire. He mortgaged his holdings, bought 14 wagons and 60 mules, took on a cargo of trade goods and set out for Santa Fe, where he unloaded 28-cent tea for \$1.50 a pound and garnered comparable profits on other commodities.

Three years after that trading expedition—the first of many—Holladay came up with a scheme that promised even higher returns. He thought of the service he had rendered the Mormons, who by now were firmly entrenched in Utah, and decided that they were very likely in sore need of manufactures from the East. A Weston merchant, Theodore Warner, supplied the goods—\$70,000 worth of clothing, implements and window glass—and Holladay provided the wagons.

Hoping the Mormons remembered him favorably, but aware of their antipathy toward all nonbelievers, he took the precaution of obtaining a letter of recommendation from his old mentor, Alexander Doniphan, to Brigham Young. When Holladay's freight-wagon train reached Salt Lake City, the letter achieved its intended effect. Young read it and thought back from this tall, powerful man before him to the youth who had sneaked through Missouri militia lines to the town of Far West 11 years before. In church the following Sunday, before his assembled people, the Mormon leader bestowed his blessing: "Brother Holladay has a stock of goods for sale and can be trusted as an honorable dealer."

The next year Holladay doubled the size of his cargo to Salt Lake City—and disposed of it as handily as before. This time, however, he did not return to Missouri. Beyond the Sierra the gold rush was on and Holladay scented the chance for a killing. In trading his goods to the Mormons he now decided to ask not for cash but for Mormon cattle at six dollars a head. Despite predictions of disaster, he drove the herd over the Sierra Nevada into California and put the stock out to pasture in the Sacramento Valley to fatten up after the exhausting journey. Holladay knew he would be bankrupt if he failed to sell the cattle, but he maintained an air of cool unconcern. When the Pacific Mail Steamship Company sent word that it might consider buying some of his beef, he replied that he was too busy to come and bargain, but amply added that he might be will-

As a gold-smelting center for nearby mines, Black Hawk Point, Colorado, received daily service by a Holladay stage from Denver. Below this 1862 view is the town of Leadville, with a Latin motto—"Let It Be Saved."



A pair of New Englanders who helped win the West

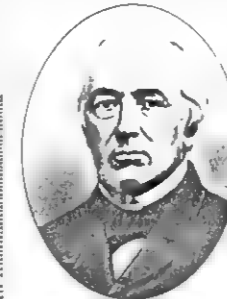
Because the Concord coach proved itself a superb performer for its arduous job, the New Hampshire factory that built it became internationally famous on the strength of that one product. The success and fame of the Concord were attributable to the lofty standards of the factory's owners, Lewis Downing and J. Stephens Abbot. They were such diligent day-to-day managers of their plant in Concord (for which their product was named) that no coach ever left the shop without the proprietors' personal inspection.

The Concord's virtues were speed, splendor and extraordinary durability. Downing and Abbot were so careful in choosing and seasoning their timber — basswood for cabin panels, elm, oak and hickory for running gear — that the wood often outlasted the ironwork. Stage men said of the Concord, "It don't break down; it only wears out" — and even the wearing out was debatable. One coach, shipped around the Horn, sank with the vessel near San Francisco. Raised after a month under water and dried out, it was still in service 50 years later.

Each vehicle was elegantly painted — the colors varied — and each carriage exterior was decorated with an original landscape or other artwork. So impressive were the results that a veteran driver, William Banning, declared the Concord was "as tidy and graceful as a lady and had, like the lady, scarcely a straight line in its body."

The collaboration that made this achievement possible began in 1826 when Downing, an ambitious wheelwright, hired Abbot, an expert coachbuilder. The partnership, with names in alphabetical order, was formed two years later and lasted until 1847. For the next 18 years the two craftsmen were rivals, but after Downing retired his son re-established the old partnership, and the Abbot-Downing Company survived into the 20th century.

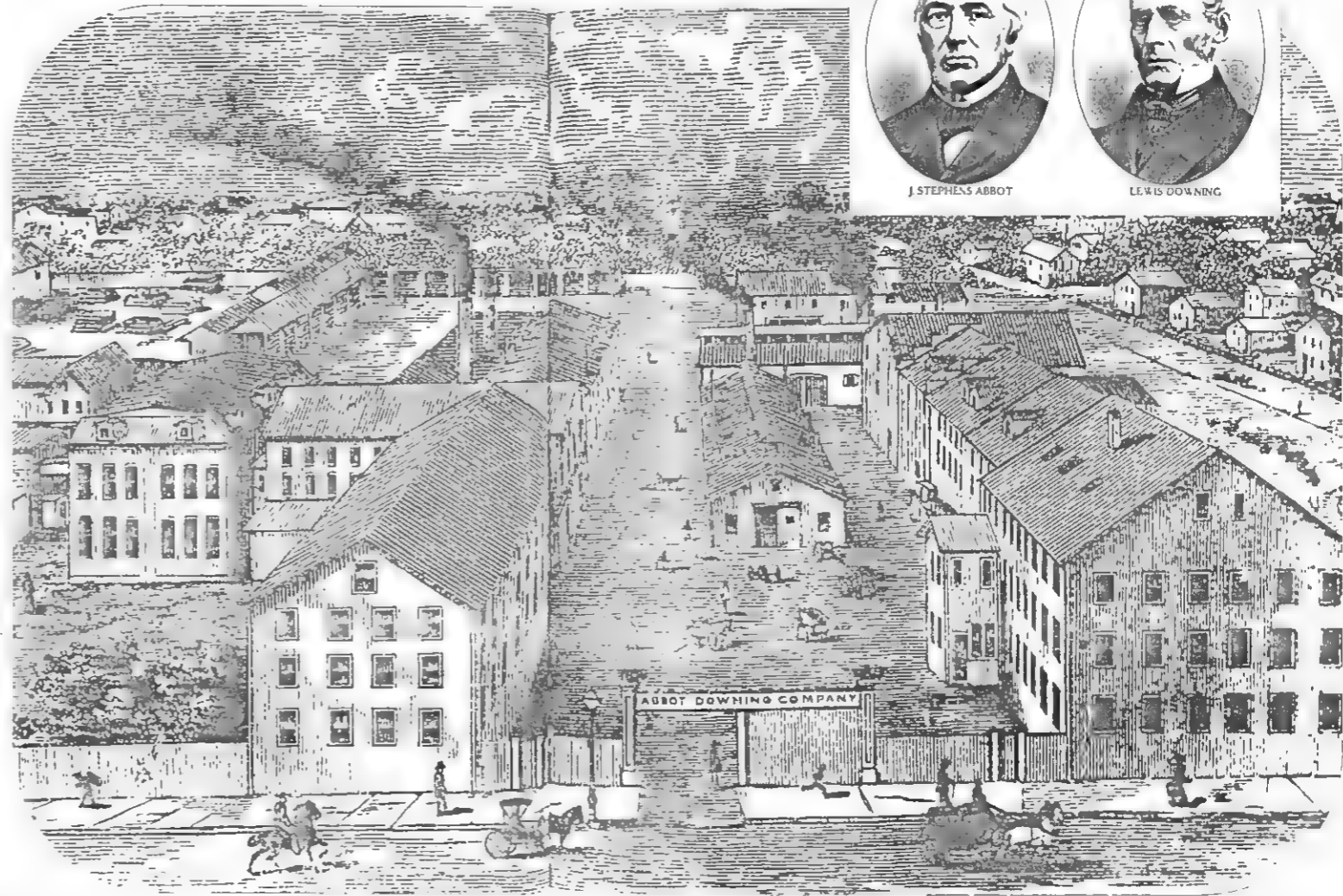
An engraving of the Concord coach factory in the 1840s reveals its success under the hands of Abbot and Downing (right). The six-acre plant employed almost 250 craftsmen producing 2,000 vehicles per year.



J. STEPHENS ABBOT



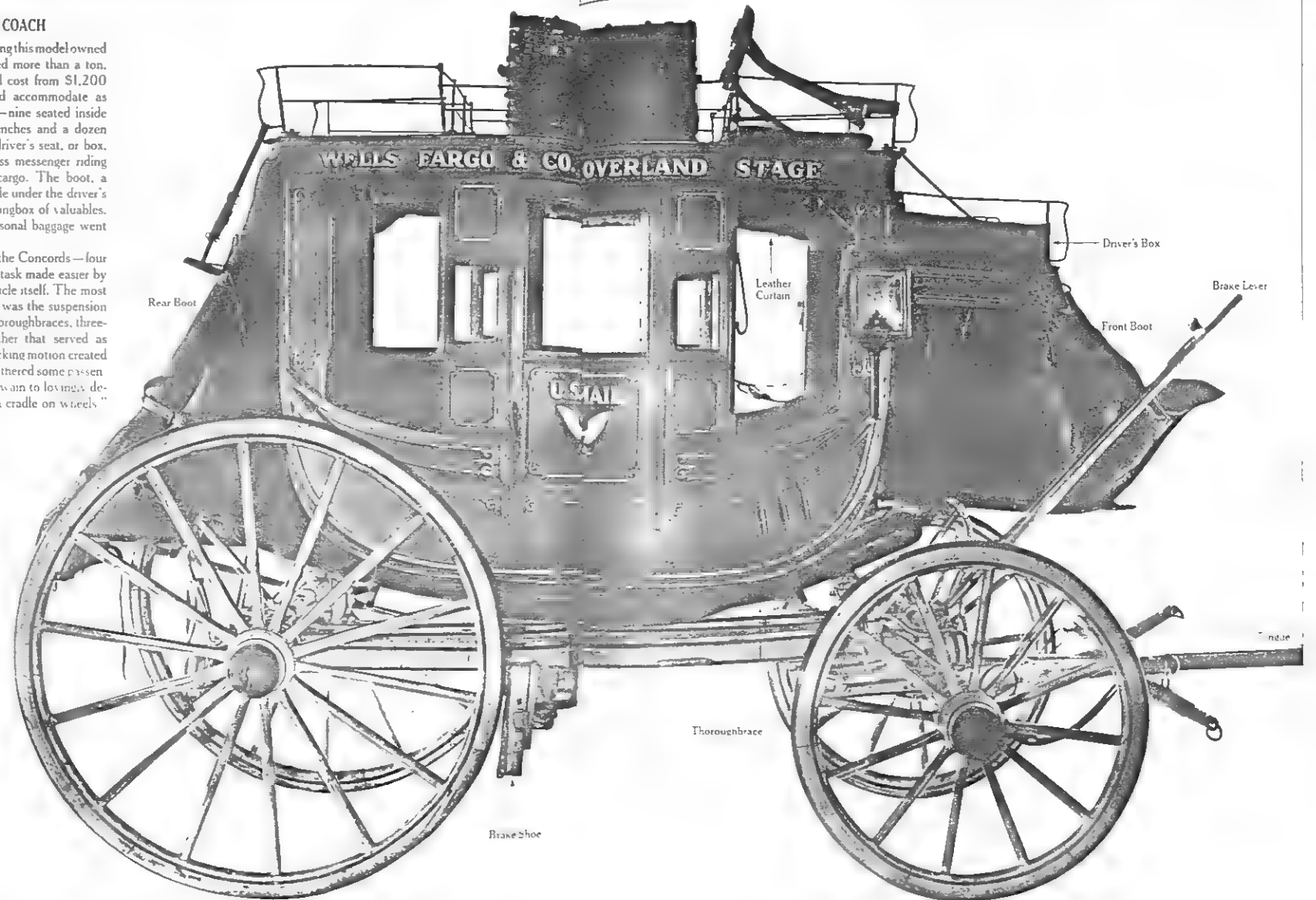
LEWIS DOWNING




THE GREAT CONCORD COACH

Concord coaches, including this model owned by Wells, Fargo, weighed more than a ton, stood eight feet high and cost from \$1,200 to \$1,500. They could accommodate as many as 21 passengers—nine seated inside on three upholstered benches and a dozen more on the roof. The driver's seat, or box, was shared by an express messenger riding shotgun over precious cargo. The boot, a leather-covered receptacle under the driver's seat, held mail and a strongbox of valuables. Express parcels and personal baggage went into a bigger rear boot.

The teams that drew the Concords—four or six horses—had their task made easier by the sturdiness of the vehicle itself. The most ingenious design feature was the suspension of the carriage on two thoroughbraces, three-inch-thick strips of leather that served as shock absorbers. The rocking motion created by the thoroughbraces bothered some passengers, but moved Mark Twain to lovingly describe the Concord as "a cradle on wheels."



Reflecting Holladay's unabashed ego, his laurel-wreathed studio portrait dominates an 1864 advertisement for his company, dwarfing the pictures of four of his aides and of a typical coach used on his line.



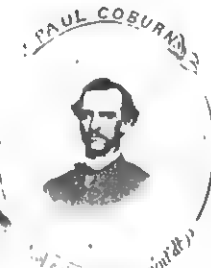
1864



DAVID STREETY
General Agent

OVERLAND STAGE LINE

*Carrying the Great Through Mails —
Between the Atlantic and the Pacific States.*




PAUL COBURN
Assistant Superintendent

*DAILY COACHES to and from
ATCHISON, OMAHA, and
NEBRASKA CITY via DENVER
CITY; connecting at Denver
with its Daily Line of
Coaches for CENTRAL CITY,
GREGORY and CLEAR-CREEK
Mining Districts; also
with Tri-weekly coaches
for TAOS, SANTA FE, and
other principal points in
NEW MEXICO.*




BEN HOLLADAY,
Proprietor.

*At SALT LAKE CITY,
connecting with its
TRI-WEEKLY LINE of
Coaches for VIRGINIA
CITY and HELENA;—
BOISE CITY, WALLA WALLA,
DALLES and PORTLAND,
Oregon;—also connecting
with the daily coaches of
The Overland Mail Company,
for AUSTIN, VIRGINIA CITY,
New SACRAMENTO, and SAN-
FRANCISCO CALA.*



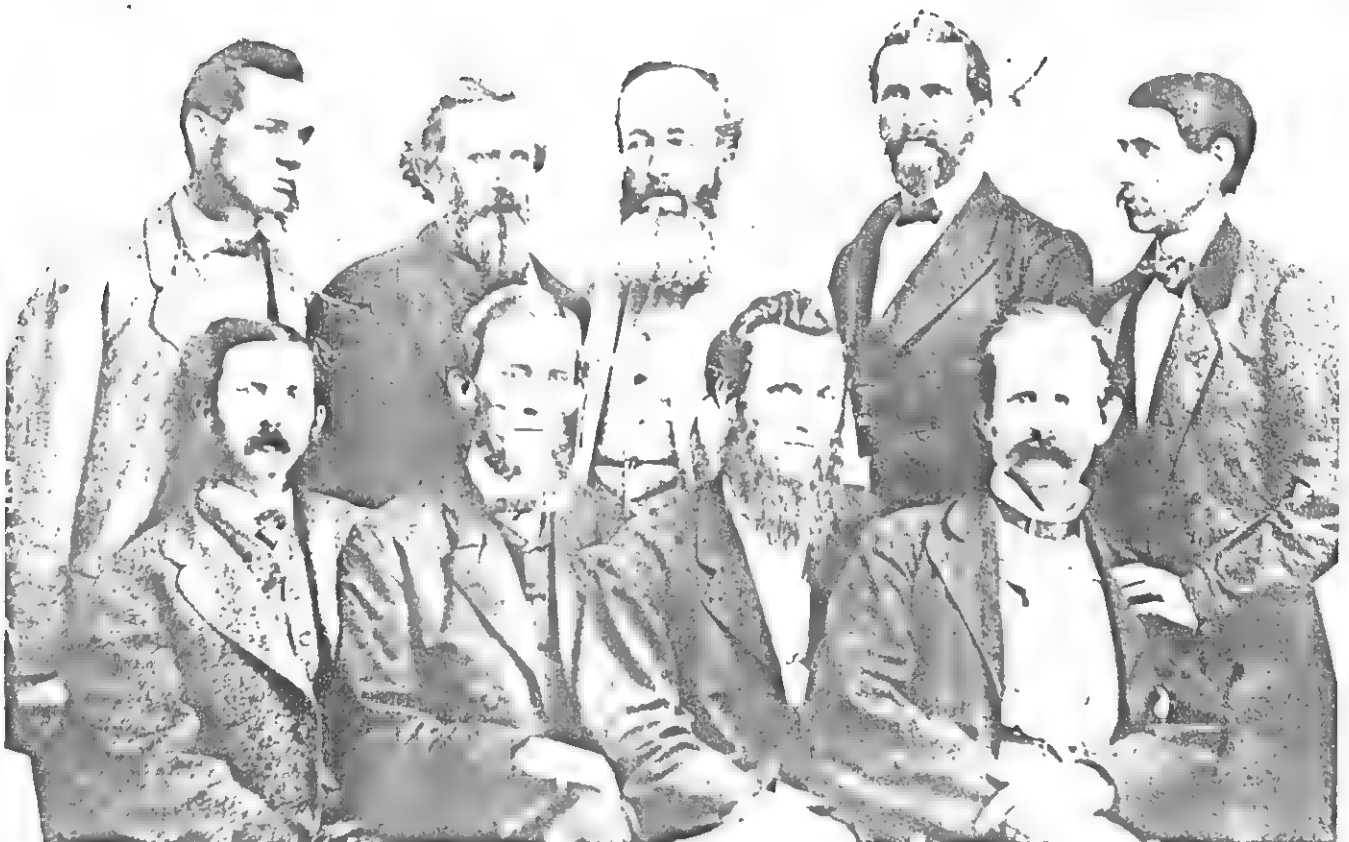
NAT. STEINER
Chief Agent Virginia City





JOS. ROBERSON
Chief Agent Salt Lake City

Inaugural passengers join David Butterfield (seated, third from left) to mark the 1865 maiden run of his stagecoach line from Atchison to Denver. The trip cut 61 miles off the competing Holladay route.



hired toughs like Jack Slade (*page 139*) to protect his vehicles from Indians or robbers.

Butterfield's business was also suffering from a post-war depression in mining activity, and by January 1866 he was in deep trouble. That month his company was reorganized under a Colorado territorial charter, with Butterfield retained as general manager. There was little doubt that Wells, Fargo was behind the reorganization, for immediately thereafter the giant agency — again joined by American Express and United States Express — made it plain to Holladay that unless he carried their express shipments on their terms, a Wells, Fargo stage line would be set up between Salt Lake and Denver to connect with the Butterfield line, effectively outflanking Holladay's monopoly.

The only reaction a challenge of that sort could evoke from a man like Holladay was fury. From New York, he ordered two of his trusted employees to serve

as spies, inspect the reorganized Butterfield operation and report to him in detail. When the private intelligence came in, he bragged to his chief Western agent, "Now I am going to take the bull by the horns!"

Holladay sent a note inviting David Bray, a New York banker who served as the president of the Butterfield line, to a luxurious luncheon that was catered by Delmonico's, New York's finest restaurant, and served in Holladay's private office. It is doubtful if his guest really enjoyed the meal. As soon as the banker — a man of diminutive stature — arrived, the huge and domineering Holladay began to harangue him: "I want to see you about your Despatch line. You are out over a million dollars, and that is not the end. You can never get your money all back. But I can get you out of it better than anyone else."

Bray may have been persuaded as much by his host's overbearing presence as by his argument. In any event,

he had to eat hastily, for Holladay had given him only until 3 p.m. to summon his board of directors and come to a decision. The decision went as Holladay expected. Before sundown the Butterfield Overland Despatch had been sold and Ben Holladay was its new owner.

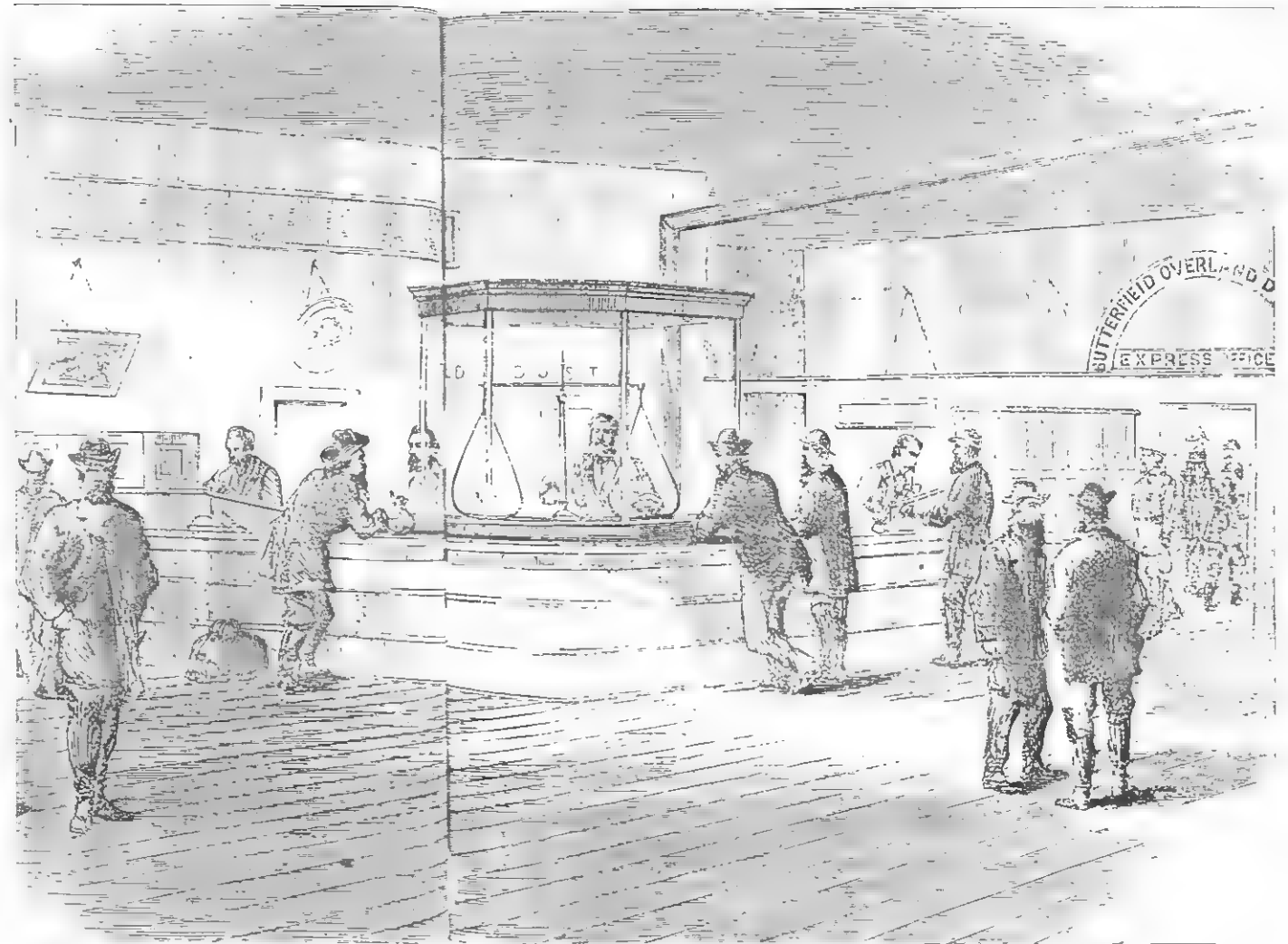
Holladay polished off this eminently successful March day in 1866 by instructing a secretary to send a telegram to Wells, Fargo and its affiliates, advising them to start their threatened line between Salt Lake and Denver, "and be damned." Having newly acquired another 585 miles of stage lines—giving him 3,145 miles in all—he raised express charges on gold shipments to 5 per cent of the mint value and raised the passenger fare for the Atchison-Salt Lake run from \$150 to \$350—an extortionate amount he had previously charged only in ostensible emergencies.

Holladay was now at the climax of his career. He knew that Union Pacific rails were pushing well into the Western plains and that a matching set was climbing the Sierra from the Pacific. He could see—painful though it may have been—that his coaching empire was facing its doom. On November 1, 1866, only eight months after he had consolidated his empire over the fiscal corpse of Butterfield Overland Despatch, Holladay suddenly sold out to Wells, Fargo for \$1.5 million in cash, \$300,000 in Wells, Fargo stock and an honorific seat on the board of directors.

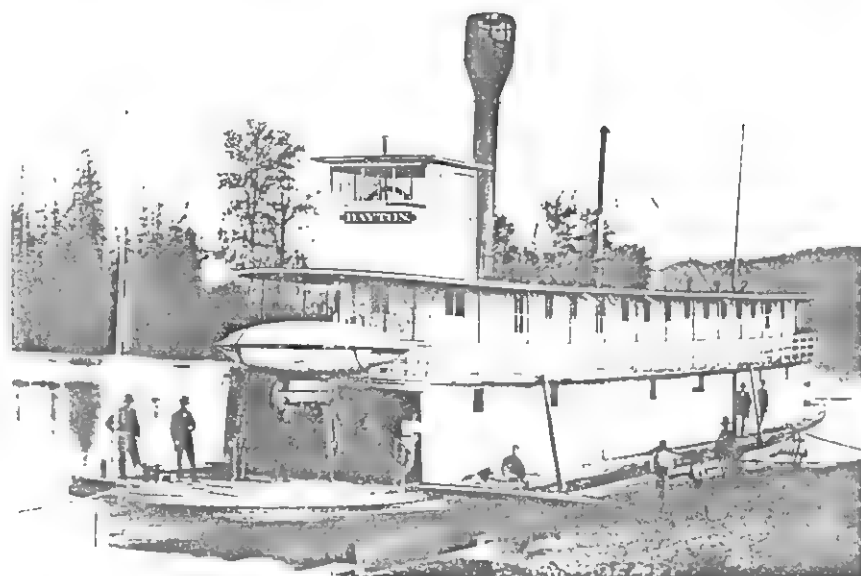
But this was scarcely enough to satisfy Holladay's appetite. Almost at once he turned his back on coaching and launched himself into river steamboating and railroading in the burgeoning Northwest, acquiring, among other properties, the Oregon & California Railroad. Holladay's dealings in his new domain were as unscrupulous as ever, his personal style as crude, and his relations with his customers no more obliging than before. "What are the people of Oregon to do?" asked a Willamette newspaper plaintively. "Will they rise in their might and strike down this monster monopolist?"

Holladay, as usual, scorned such barbs. He built a handsome new mansion in Portland, entertained lavishly and bribed state legislators by the dozen. He seemed to have succeeded in transferring his enormous power intact from stagecoaching to newer means of transport—but it soon developed that he harbored yet another ambition. He wanted—as he revealed to his retinue of hangers-on—to be a U.S. Senator. The poet Joa-

Employees of C. A. Cook's bank in Denver weigh miners' gold dust before it is shipped from David Butterfield's express office. This handy arrangement cut into Holladay's business.



The stern-wheeler *Dayton*, seen moored on the Willamette River, was one of nine steamboats that Holladay acquired to form a river-going fleet in Oregon. The venture postdated the sale of his staging empire.



quin Miller, whose family had settled in Oregon in the 1850s, wrote letters and newspaper columns, probably for a fee, assiduously promoting Holladay's candidacy: "I do not say that Ben Holladay built the city of Portland or brought all the wealth and ready money that now floods the state," Miller conceded, "but I do venture to say that he has done more in that direction than any other one individual."

But neither Miller's prose nor Holladay's bribes could make him a plausible candidate. Ben then decided that if he could not have the Senate seat for himself, at least he could control the man who did win it. In 1872 a suitably pliable candidate was found in the person of John H. Mitchell, and a campaign was launched to woo the support of the state legislature, the body then responsible for electing U.S. Senators. There were some tense moments during the campaign when Oregon papers reported Mitchell's simple political credo: "Whatever is Ben Holladay's politics is my pol-

itics, and whatever Ben Holladay wants, I want." But \$100,000 spread among the state's legislators neutralized the caviling of the Holladay-haters, and Mitchell in due course was elected and went to Washington.

To finance his rail and steamship ventures as well as his aborted political ambitions, Holladay had floated a complex structure of bonds and debentures. The stratagem was not new for him: occasionally in the past, when he had found himself overextended—when, for instance, he was using his capital to buy out competitors—he had thought nothing of launching a new bond issue and using the proceeds to pay the interest on the old. This time, however, Holladay sold his bonds and debentures not only on Wall Street but also in the money markets of Europe—a logical extension of his philosophy that the farther away his investors and backers were, the better.

As long as distant bankers and speculators retained faith in the Holladay magic, the philosophy worked.

The first train of the Oregon & California Railroad—Holladay's last speculative venture—chugs along track built in 1868 and 1869. He lost this remaining vestige of his empire in the financial panic of 1873.



Even those men of finance suspicious enough to make the long journey to the Northwest to double check their investments in person tended to succumb either to Holladay's dazzling performances or his browbeatings or his bribes. His most important backers consisted of a consortium of German bondholders. When the disturbing rumors of Holladay's fiscal manipulations reached this group at last, it dispatched a representative, one Baron de Lasley, to investigate. But the Baron's English was flawed, and Holladay managed to fast-talk his guest into producing a favorable report on the results of his inquiry.

Then, on September 18, 1873, the New York stock market plummeted. In the panic that ensued one of the earliest collapses was that of the Holladay empire. On this occasion, with money scarce and scared as well, there was no floating a new bond issue to pay on an old one. Holladay had no choice but to default. From Europe and Wall Street his creditors swooped in

like vultures to pick over the carcass of his railroad and various other properties.

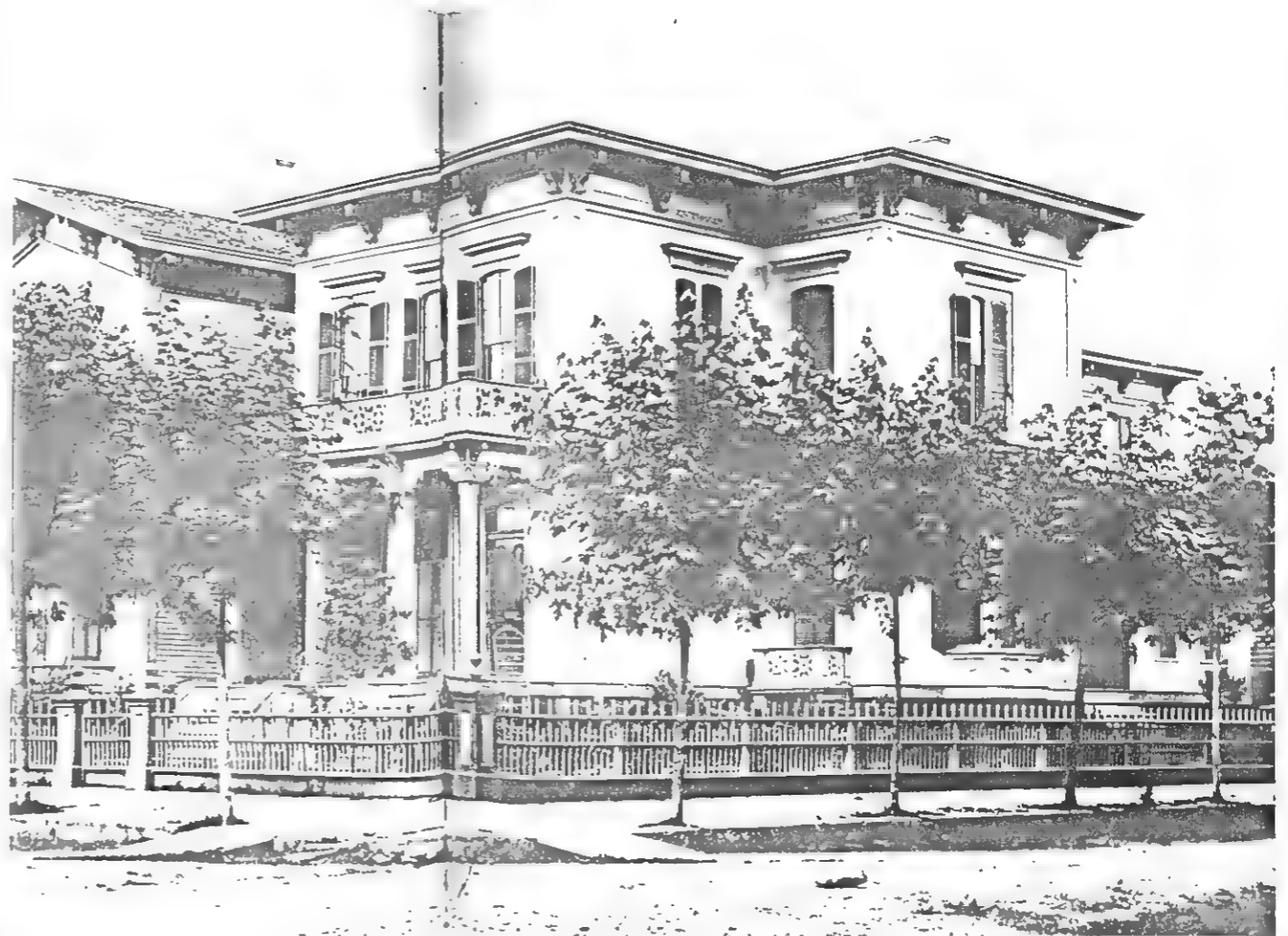
It fell to the German bondholders to bring some order out of the financial chaos. They appointed an American journalist of German birth, Henry Villard—son-in-law of the famed abolitionist editor, William Lloyd Garrison—as their agent to guard the dwindling assets. On a visit to the Northwest, Villard soon discovered the magnitude of Holladay's recklessness and the inaccuracy of his accounting. Where Holladay had assured the Germans that 375 miles of Oregon & California railway track would be laid, Villard found only 250. Where the Germans had been led to believe booming towns flourished along the right of way, Villard found sparsely populated settlements and undeveloped tracts of forest. Finally, Villard made a shrewdly realistic assessment of the great man himself. Holladay, said Villard, was "illiterate, coarse, boastful, and cunning." Moreover, he was through. After a inter-

regnum during which Holladay was reduced to a powerless name on the letterhead. Villard personally took control of the railroad.

When Holladay's luck ran out at last, it ran all the way out, in his personal life as well as business. His beloved wife, Ann, who had slept through that coach robbery years earlier and whose hard-won social status was Holladay's only claim to respectability, died at Ophir Farm in New York on the same day her husband defaulted on the Oregon & California's bonds. One after another, their four grown children fell away. Ben's favorite daughter, Jennie, who had married a worthless European nobleman at her mother's behest, died in childbirth after a visit to her father in Oregon. Son Joe, a lifelong wastrel, drank himself to death in Hong Kong. Daughter Polly, who like her sister had married a European and fallen on evil times, died aboard a ship bound for New York. Holladay's surviving child and namesake, Ben Jr., bitterly contested with his father for title to the few properties remaining in the family, and died, like his brother, an alcoholic. None of the children lived to middle age.

Holladay himself remarried a year after Ann's death, taking as his second wife young Lydia Esther Campbell, daughter of an Oregon pioneer. Portland gossips were outraged at what they felt to be a mismatch between a sweet innocent and a reprobate 30 years her senior, but the marriage proved happy and enduring. The second Mrs. Holladay gave him two children, a new family and renewed zest. He tried for a comeback with the fragmentary properties that still remained, only to be stopped this time by one of his brothers, Joe, who claimed title to them. There was more battling and disappointment until, in 1887 in his 68th year, Holladay died in Portland. His longtime friend and attorney, a man named John Doniphan (evidently a relative of Colonel Doniphan), summed up for the late Stagecoach King, "I regard Ben Holladay as one of nature's gifted children," Doniphan wrote in a letter some time later to the *Catholic Tribune* of St. Joseph, Missouri, "Had he been on the same theater, he was capable of playing the role of Napoleon, as I think he resembled him in many characteristics. He believed results justified means, and he trusted in his star too far." It was surely as fair an epitaph as Holladay could have expected—had he been the kind of man to care about such things.

Holladay played out the finale of his career, including a vain bid to become a U.S. Senator, from this stately residence in downtown Portland. He hung the walls with fine art and reportedly stocked the cellar with enough wine "to float the Navy," but Oregon voters only resented the ostentation.



A stagecoach races out of Colonda, Nevada, in 1887, speeding to make a connection to San Francisco.

5 Rocky roads to adventure

For several decades in the mid-19th Century, almost anyone who had to go anywhere in the West went by stage. Some travelers had a relatively easy time of it. A mere 24-hour journey, for example, confronted passengers on a coach of the Pioneer Stage Company,

which covered the fairly short run between California and Nevada. Pioneer's was a bullion-rich territory, and the line served it well with Concord coaches

(below) and high-stepping teams. But even here, linked danger and discomfort. When one Pioneer coach upset, riders were bricked by a ton of silver bars that had been piled on the carriage floor.

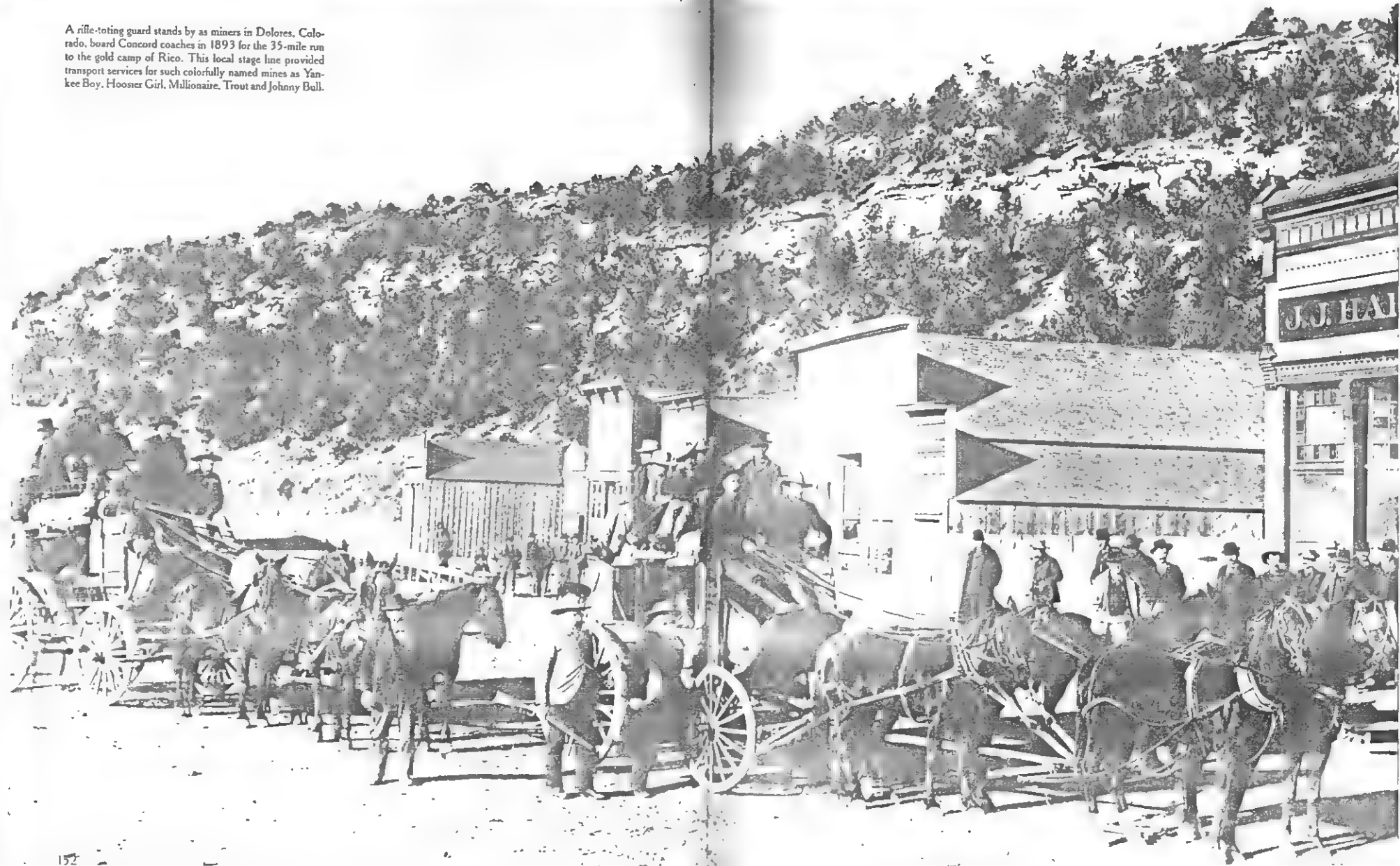
If the traveler undertook a full cross-country journey from the Missouri to the Pacific, he faced hundreds of hours of cramped, sleepless, dust-choking anguish. True, there were interesting, low passengers and magnificent vistas,

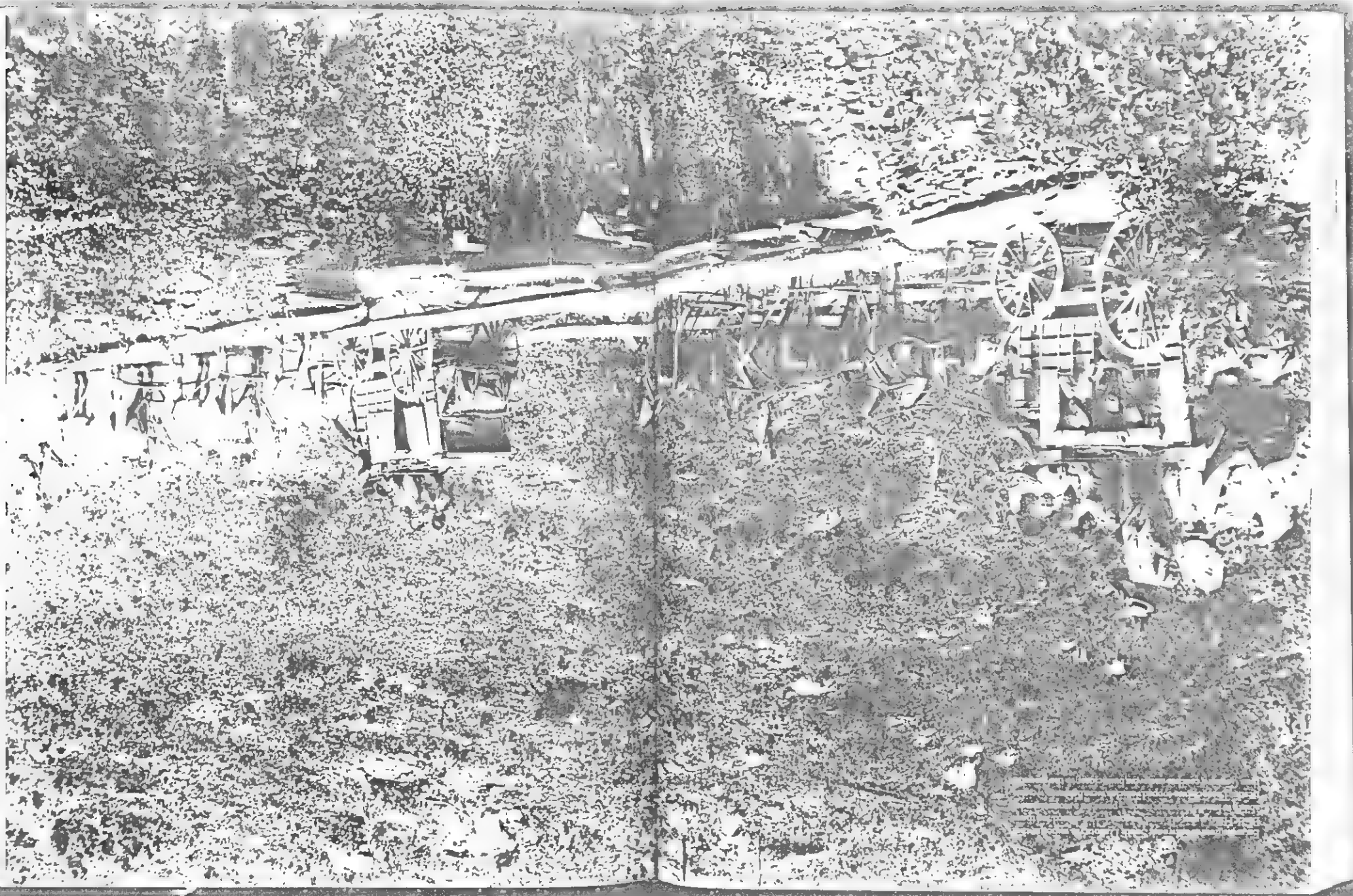
but there was also the nerve-racking possibility of a runaway team, flash flood or savage gust of prairie wind that might bring a coach to ruin in the middle of nowhere.

Even if no calamity occurred, the traveler was certain to be thoroughly exhausted at the conclusion. One survivor described his trip as "the hardest two weeks' work I ever did," and then stumbled off to a solid 20 hours in bed.



A rifle-toting guard stands by as miners in Dolores, Colorado, board Concord coaches in 1893 for the 35-mile run to the gold camp of Rico. This local stage line provided transport services for such colorfully named mines as Yankee Boy, Hoosier Girl, Millionaire, Trout and Johnny Bull.





The arrival of the stagecoach in Cripple Creek, Colorado, in 1892 draws a crowd, and for good reason. The stage often brought fascinating strangers in the new west, attire, and it carried away another kind of exciting cargo: million from the fifth richest gold-producing area in the world.





A stage leaving Deadwood, Dakota Territory, in the late 1870s, gets a send-off from miners and townfolk. The destinations listed at the ticket office included such foreign ports as Liverpool and Hamburg.

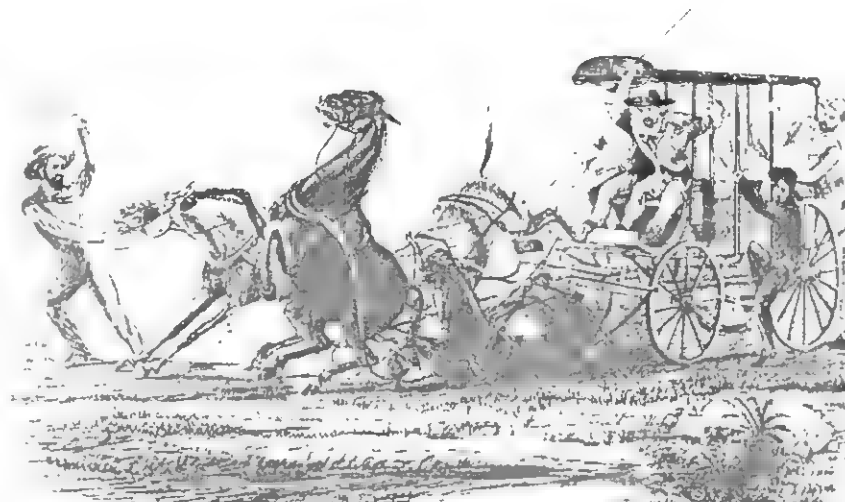
that would be their transport and, indeed, most of their world for days to come. Those going through to California had paid as much as \$600 for their passage. Some of them certainly looked as if they had that kind of money; their tailored suits and white linen bespoke more fashionable haunts back home. All of them, stylish or not, had the jocular, somewhat self-conscious manner of people on the brink of an act of great daring.

As usual, a few Atchison residents were on hand to see the stage off, and travelers and townsmen exchanged pleasantries. A local wag tried a well-worn joke, suggesting that the passengers get short haircuts "so the Arapahos can't scalp you," and causing one or two wry faces among his listeners. An Easterner carrying baggage, cheese, crackers and some tins of sardines and herring was congratulated on his foresight; the food at the stage stations en route, an Atchison man had heard, left a lot to be desired.

Now and then a ticket holder cast an admiring glance at the glistening coach that stood waiting. It was a Concord, universally considered the finest stagecoach ever built, with a carriage not quite eight feet long and five feet wide. That may have seemed rather small for riding nine passengers — not to say an overflow of mail and packages — but if the traveler had any qualms he was reassured by a glimpse of the interior, with its fine leather upholstery, wood paneling and fittings of polished metal. Leather curtains at the windows served in place of glass; leather, the ticket agent explained to a querulous, less hazardous and better able to absorb the dust, wind, rain and possibly snow that might be encountered along the route.

Finally, the last of the mail and baggage was loaded. The driver emerged from the stage office, climbed onto his lofty perch, called the box — just forward of the carriage. Next to him settled the one company employee who always went along: the excise messenger, whose functions included looking after the passengers, packages and mail, and guarding the strong-box in the front boot. His double-barreled shotgun was prominently displayed.

The driver shouted "All aboard!" the passengers hastily clambered into the carriage and the stockmen tugged on the cinches that drew the harness tight. At the flurry of activity, it did not seem possible that in a half-hour had passed since the horses had turned out.



Unbroken and unruly lead mules rear under the driver's whip as the pair behind them in the team pitches over in a tangle of harness.

Overland on the Oxbow: a personal portfolio

A trip on the Butterfield Overland Mail offered passengers a few diversions and all too many discomforts, encountered in harnessing a refractory team of mules, fording a river of unknown depth, or any number of similar misadventures. One passenger who experienced his share of both good moments and bad was William Hayes Hilton. In the fall of 1858, Hilton booked passage from San Francisco to St. Louis on the Oxbow Route. He traveled mostly on celerity wagons, light stagecoaches with roller flaps on the sides, which were especially suited to use on rough roads. During the trip Hilton covered a sketch pad with scenes of the high points, some of which are shown here. Hilton's mustache is a key feature, easy to identify in the sketches. (left) and the night guard (opposite p. 165) as the artist himself.



From the back of a moving coach, a passenger's wife tells an ante-lope (center) the story of the trip.



In the early days of the line, some stages halted at night. Here a passenger watches over sleeping companions and grazing animals.



Crossing a Texas river, passengers' antelope perches on the stationmaster's head, and a nearby depot is visible in the distance.

ably based this comment on a journey blessed by unusually fine weather. There were times in summer when the wind gusted almost visibly across the prairie, rattling coaches, staggering horses and blowing baggage away. Hail beat like bullets and teams turned tail to the storm. Sheets of rain blasted through the coaches' leather curtains and drenched everyone inside. "Kansas brags on its thunder and lightning," Horace Greeley reported, "and the boast is well founded." He was assured, probably by someone describing a tornado, that at times the wind blew so hard it snatched the iron tires from coach wheels. Under the summer sun the grass turned to straw

and prairie fires might sweep over thousands of acres. When that happened, coaches ran through choking smoke and soot; and when the wind shifted suddenly, horses bolted for their lives.

At Fort Kearney—253 miles out of Atchison—the westward trail met the Platte River, which the route would follow for several hundred miles. The Platte was a central landmark that produced divergent reactions in those who saw it for the first time. A Pennsylvania newspaperman named Alexander McClure was unimpressed. "The river Platte is wide, shallow, muddy, treacherous and apparently useless," McClure wrote.

"It does not even skirt its own banks with timber." When he did see trees, he amended his notes only slightly: "Occasionally it presents a pretty growth of cottonwood for a few miles, but they are mere apologies for trees and make the general view, if possible, more cheerless by their deformed and stunted growth."

The veteran stage messenger Frank Root, whose regular run was between Atchison and Denver, and who thus had ample opportunity to study the terrain as he rode on the box beside the driver, saw the Platte in almost poetic terms, "fringed here and there with miniature forest belts and the rich, dark soil was covered

with tall, luxuriant native grasses." He particularly enjoyed moonlit summer nights, with "silvery rays being reflected in the waters of the beautiful stream."

Everyone agreed, however, that the landscape was more austere than the countryside just west of Atchison, and that the passage through it was more demanding. "The Platte mosquitoes lacerated me through the sleeves of two woolen shirts," Richardson reported, adding that dust covered his companions so thoroughly that "for several minutes I did not know them."

Richardson's complaints were mild by comparison with the annoyance expressed by McClure, an invet-



A way-station manager leads out a fresh team of horses for an incoming stage, as his aproned wife stands at the door to greet the hungry driver.

The name of this particular station at a river crossing in eastern Wyoming might have given nervous passengers pause: it was Robbins.

A crusty driver who grumped his way to fame

The bluff, hard-driving, hard-drinking Hank (Henry James) Monk, a veteran reinsman on California stages, was a likely candidate for fame of some kind. And it took only one encounter with Horace Greeley to render Monk a certified legend of Western stage-coaching. He had Greeley, the great New York editor, aboard one day on a downhill run to Placerville, and Greeley asked for haste, fearing he would be late for a lecture. Obliging, Monk snapped his whip, and soon they were rocketing down the mountain road so wildly that the editor was pitching helplessly around the inside of the coach like a loose mailbag. Greeley called out that he wasn't in *that* much of a hurry. But Monk, now in the spirit of the thing, yelled back, "Keep your seat, Horace, I'll get you there on time."

Years later, Monk's California admirers gave him a gold watch with his admonition to Greeley engraved inside. As for Greeley himself, the experience so haunted him and deflated his ego that he reportedly said of Monk, "He was the only man ever to make me look the fool."

Monk often did as much for others in his three decades as an exemplar of his trade. On one occasion, glimpsing a would-be bandit on the road ahead, Monk poured the last of his whiskey over his head and slumped down in a simulated stupor. When the highwayman incautiously ignored him and turned to rob the passengers, Monk stealthily grabbed a length of iron pipe and laid the robber out cold. Then he bellowed at his astonished passengers. "You and the bullion's safe, but that bastard cost me my last drink!"



Though muffled in winter gear, Monk keeps his hands bare to give him the feel of the reins.

Stogie-chomping Charley Parkhurst (left) was a hell-for-leather California stage driver for three decades. When Charley died, friends who were preparing the body discovered that Charley was actually a woman.



keeper always kept in readiness for the driver. "Certainly," was the driver's prompt reply, "if you haven't any graybacks [lice] about you."

Any traveler who tried to teach a driver his business was a brash man indeed. Frank Root told of one reinsman, Rodney West, who was known as "Bishop," perhaps for his solemn ways. On a mountain road an Easterner invited himself into the seat next to Bishop and proceeded to entertain him with tales of the superiority of Eastern drivers and coaching. Finally they reached a steep incline, and Bishop locked the rear wheels for the descent, a maneuver that seemed to amuse the Easterner enormously. Bishop kept his silence and the coach started down the mountain, racing just inches away from a cliff. Root elaborated: "The tenderfoot grew more and more paralyzed. His extensive experience had not accustomed him to just that kind of a road. Finally he made one frantic leap and landed on the hillside. 'Bishop' never checked his horses. Some hours later Mr. Tenderfoot followed on foot

and had the pleasure of waiting for the next stage."

The Easterner had committed not one *faux pas*, but two. Snickering at the driver's technique was bad enough; preempting the seat alongside him without consulting him was worse. Deciding who would share the driver's box was the driver's prerogative. If the weather was good and his mood congenial, he might ask the express messenger to yield his place temporarily to a favored passenger. It was an honor travelers seldom refused, precarious as the perch might seem.

There was no experience like it, sitting next to a Jehu decked out in the finery he sported, watching him deftly wield his whip—its stock sometimes aglitter with silver—but best of all, listening to his wit and wisdom.

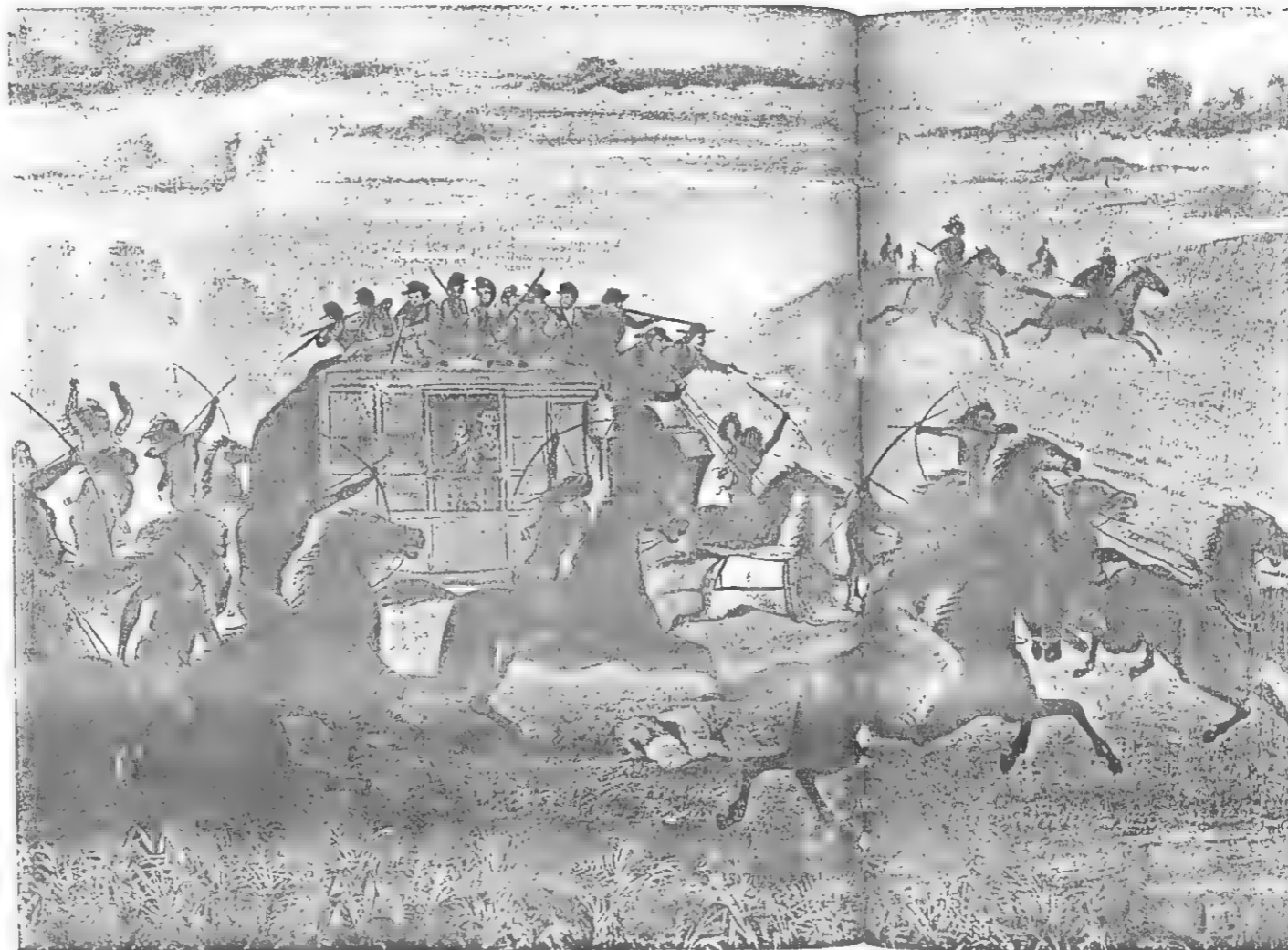
Occasionally the driver might surprise a cultured seatmate by his familiarity with a foreign language or two or with Shakespeare or Scripture. More often he proved to be a natural storyteller, spinning yarns by the score. An Englishman who on several occasions served as an audience later wryly observed that some drivers "have really such excessive regard for the truth that they use it with penurious frugality." Few other travelers found that a fault.

Inevitably, as passengers reported with relish about such encounters, a stereotype of the stage driver as knight of the road became fixed in the popular imagination. Sadly, however, there were exceptions. Some drivers were arrant show-offs; one of them was so proud of his short, quick turns that he eventually overturned his stage and smashed it. Now and then a driver turned to crime. Frank Williams drove his Montana stage into an ambush and called out, "Here they are, boys." His seven waiting co-conspirators killed five passengers and made off with express valuables worth \$70,000. Williams was tracked to Denver, captured and hanged.

There were drivers who were fools or cowards. Alexander McClure and his wife were riding a stage during the Indian wars of the late 1860s when the driver announced that he would take care of himself in the event of attack, even if it meant taking one of his lead horses and deserting his stage and passengers. But McClure and another occupant of the coach were armed, and the driver was soon given to understand that he and his lead horse were to remain with the stage.

Fortunately for Western travel, many more drivers were capable of heroism. A typical example was Hank

An Indian war party, swooping down on a stage in this scene by artist George Simons, encounters unexpected resistance from a security escort of soldiers riding on the roof. The Army could rarely spare men for such duty, and stage lines sometimes had to detour around danger areas.



Harper, who was shot by an Indian sniper in Utah in 1862. He crumpled into the boot below his seat, dying, and gasped for one of the passengers. In response, a corpulent judge clambered up the side of the swaying coach. Harper fitted the reins into his hand and gave him instructions on how to take the road. By the time the judge brought the team to a halt at the next station, Hank Harper was dead.

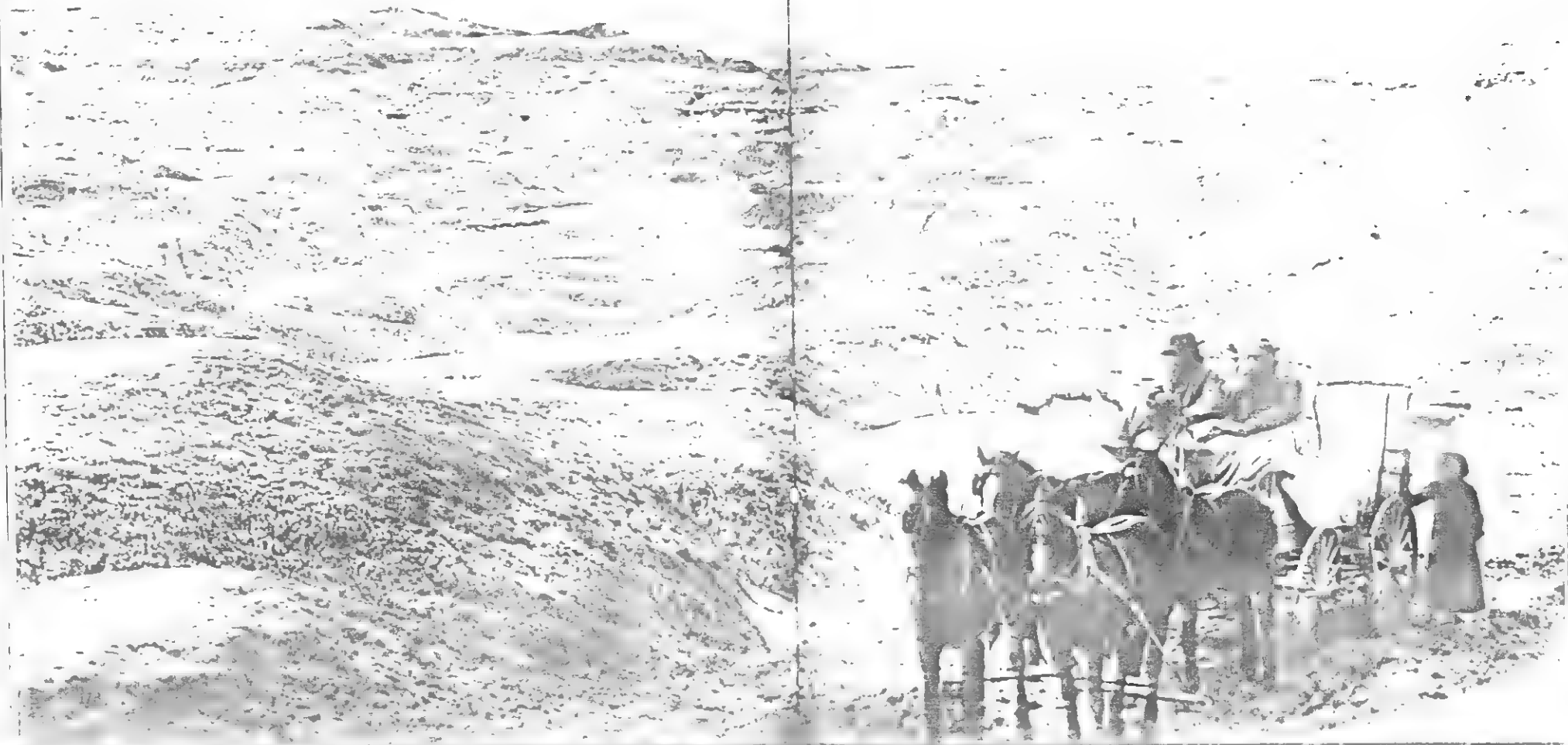
Bob Emery was driving a coach in Kansas in 1864 when Indians jumped it. The terrified passengers shrieked for more speed; Emery put the whip to the horses. In *The Omaha Bee's* account: "There were two points at which all would have been lost but for the driver's wonderful presence of mind. There were two abrupt turns in the road where the coach would have been thrown over had he not brought the team to a halt and turned with care. This he did to the dismay of some of the passengers, who saw escape only in speed, but their subsequent praise of his conduct was as great as his courage was cool and calculating. George Constable, who was conducting an ox train over the route, saw the coach about a mile ahead, and at once corralled his twenty-five wagons. The brave driver drove his nine passengers into this shelter and safety."

Emery died of illness within the year; on his deathbed one of the passengers he had saved brought him a gold ring engraved with the group's thanks and slipped it onto his finger.

A time always came on the long journey westward when stage travelers began to wish devoutly for its end. The reasons were many: the critical loss of sleep; the grinding discomfort of close quarters, hours of tedium, hours of terrifying peril either natural or man-made. The worst was the lack of sleep.

The passengers in the coach would doze, drop into deeper slumber, fall against their neighbors, awaken with a start and begin to doze again. They braced themselves when they could, but usually their heads rolled and their necks strained with each jolt of the coach. Their legs swelled, their muscles cramped, their joints began to throb. Each movement pushed someone else and forced him to move; half comatose, the passengers muttered and grumbled. Again they would sleep, and again they would awaken, not sure if they had been asleep for an hour or a minute. A California physician,

The desolation of eastern Utah badlands called the Devil's Playground engulfs a stagecoach whose crew and passenger are bundled up against the chill. The biting winds and dust of such barren stretches were as much a trial to stage travelers as the risk of an Indian attack or an accident.



The grim scene of a coach severed in half, its dead horses still in harness, draws spectators after an accident near Redding, California. Careening over on uneven terrain was a constant hazard of stagecoach travel.



Wreck of Weaverville Stage near Redding, Cal.

when there was time for a nap, the only passengers not condemned to stretch out on the earthen floor were women; a woman was allowed to share the bed of the station keeper's wife—if the keeper were gallant enough to yield his place. Bad as the rest accommodations were, the facilities for refreshing oneself were worse. At the least, washing water had to be hauled from a creek; some stations had to cart water a dozen miles.

There was only one redeeming feature to offset the ordeal of coping with the generally primitive conditions, the indescribable filth and inedible food. After the close company on the coach, travelers—especially the journalists among them—were delighted to see new faces and hear new stories. Among the people passing through, or visiting from the ranches and settlements nearby, were buffalo hunters, Indian-fighters, stockmen and assorted adventurers. Twain had the unusual experience of encountering an old boyhood friend with whom he had been on the outs since the time he had dropped a watermelon on the fellow's head from a second-story window in Hannibal, Missouri. His friend hadn't taken this at all well but now, a thousand miles from home, the old animus was forgotten.

Horace Greeley discovered that a station keeper he engaged in conversation was a former Cincinnati lawyer, and his wife a onetime actress in New York City. But they were an unusually polished couple; most of the station people were predictably roughhewn. Twain thought that "from western Nebraska to Nevada a considerable sprinkling of them might be fairly set down as outlaws." The men sported blue homespun pantaloons patched with yellow buckskin and stuffed into high boots. Often protruding from one boot was a horn-handled fighting knife, and many keepers carried a long-barreled Colt's revolver in a belt holster.

The solitude they endured could be punishing. Loneliness explained the pets, usually cats—once even a brace of owls—that travelers found at stations. Sometimes, in the desperate mutual need for companionship, the station people would have the residents of other stations and ranches come in from miles around for a dance. There would be music and whiskey and laughter all night; in the morning the revelers would hitch a stage on a stage back to their stark lives.

Stage passengers could feel the anguish of isolation in the hunger these outlanders had for news and long

material. Richardson remembered an unkempt stock tender who, after hitching up a new team, held up his lantern to the coach and asked the passengers, "Gentlemen, can you spare me a newspaper? I have not seen one for a week and can't endure it much longer. I will give a dollar for any newspaper in the United States not more than ten days old."

In all there were 153 home stations between Atchison and Placerville and ultimately the last of them was passed. By then the original complement of passengers on a coach had been replaced, at least in part, by new travelers. Some of the early ones had gotten off at Denver, others at Salt Lake City—either to change to the California-bound coach, or to stay in the Mormon capital, or to travel on small feeder stage lines to towns and settlements well distant from the main overland route.

An amateur poet on one coach, looking back over his trek westward, produced some lines of doggerel that he thought summed up the venture:

*Creeping through the valley, crawling o'er the hill,
Splashing through the branches, rumbling o'er the mill;
Putting nervous gentlemen in a lowering rage,
What is so provoking as riding in a stage?*

*Spinsters fair and forty, maids in youthful charms,
Suddenly are cast into their neighbors' arms;
Children shoot like squirrels darting through a cage
Isn't it delightful, riding in a stage?*

*Feet are interlacing, heads severely bumped,
Friends and foe together get their noses thumped;
Dresses act as carpets—listen to the sage:
"Life is but a journey taken in a stage."*

When finally the last night passed and the last joltings were over, most passengers were not inclined to such philosophizing. Exhausted and dirty as they pulled themselves together, they got off the stage without looking back and headed for a hotel, a bath, a barber and a bed. William Tallack of England, a man of extraordinary good spirits, remembered "leaping off the coach" when it came to a halt: he must have had unusual strength left. Albert Richardson saw the arrival as a kind of triumph: "Our vehicle whirled around the last street corner, ran for several yards poised upon two wheels, while the others were more than a foot from

the ground; and with this neat stroke ended our ride."

The long journey was over, and the travelers were glad of it. But inevitably, after the irritation had worn off, the view in retrospect was one of pride of participation in an unforgettable exploit.

Everyone, it seemed, had a special memory, a special story to tell. The foresighted Easterner who had brought some victuals with him recalled how he had saved the day on one stretch of the road when a wheel grew so hot it locked on the axle. Wheels were supposed to be greased at every home station, but sometimes this chore was ignored. Lacking grease, the driver was considering laying blades of grass along the axle for the wheel to turn on when the Easterner produced a piece of cheese. They cut thin slices, wound them around the axle, slipped the wheel back on and rode into the next station.

Demas Barnes, a mining inspector, always got a laugh telling about the day he found himself sharing his coach with a young widow and her four small children. As night fell, Barnes did his best for the children, arranging mail sacks and blankets into beds for them. The children drifted off to sleep, but their mother paled with terror. Barnes, a well-intentioned man, described her anguish: "The woman!—dear me!—not gifted with Eve's gentle confidences, posted herself upright in the furthest corner, and insisted she would not sleep all night; and I think she would have declared she had kept her word had I not had to climb out for her lost bonnet once or twice. The Lord forgive her awful suspicions!"

A preacher remembered riding along the Platte in 1867 when Indians attacked. By a rare chance he happened to be the sole passenger at the time. The Indians' first volley killed the driver, knocking him off the box. The minister described what followed: "I saw the driver keel over and the horses swerve from the road off onto the prairie. My first impulse was to get the lines and fetch the horses back on the road. So I climbed out of the window and got upon the box, but the lines had dropped on the ground. I climbed down to pick up the lines, the Indians popping away all the time, and just then the coach struck a wallow. Down I went into the mud and the stage went on without me." To his surprise and pleasure, the Indians followed the stage and he crawled off to the river and safety.

Alexander McClure's wife also recalled an encounter with Indians that turned out all right, but what she



Aboard a mud wagon caked with evidence of the mucky road just traversed, a woman gives her infant a look at the Montana scenery. The vehicle's canvas curtains and roof helped to cut down on its weight.

remembered most vividly was quaking on the coach floor, and clutching a revolver her husband had given her—with strict orders to turn it on herself if the Indians succeeded in their attack.

McClure's own favorite story concerned a day of unbelievable winter weather during a feeder-line ride from Virginia City, Montana, eastward. "The atmosphere was thick with frost," he wrote, "and throughout the day the sun was unfit. The horses' nostrils were covered with ice and the mustaches of the driver and passengers were all frozen into uniform whiteness. That night the mercury stood at thirty below zero."

The travelers stopped for the night at a station and the next day exchanged their coach for an open sleigh, whose runners could negotiate the snowy roads better than the wheels of the coach. They started at five in the morning, McClure recalled, and "not a face was visible. The driver had a fur mask and the passengers looked like so many blocks covered with robes. Just as day was breaking, the sleigh got off the beaten road and we were tumbled pell-mell into snow up to our waists.

It was a terrible ordeal, for our hands were almost frozen, even in our fur gloves, before we got restored to our places. Three upsets before ten o'clock relieved the monotony of this memorable morning ride."

One of the most spellbinding experiences of all befell Dr. Tucker, the California physician, and he related it at loving length. He was on his way home to San Francisco from St. Louis, and traveling not the central overland route but by way of the south. Perhaps it was the heat that helped kindle the passions of which he told.

Tucker was sitting with a handsome plainsman from Texas when two gamblers, accompanied by two women, entered the coach. All of the newcomers were French. Soon a flirtation began between "Texas" and the younger woman. The next to enter the coach was a fat, foul-tempered German (Tucker had decided ethnic views), who complained of the crowding and insisted on smoking a strong pipe, despite the presence of ladies. Eventually he went to sleep leaning against the door and snored loudly. "Texas" reached around him and slipped the door latch; the door opened on the next

bump and the German fell out. When his fellow passengers retrieved him, he furiously accused them of attempted murder and became so violent that they refused to let him reenter the coach, forcing him to ride on top.

The younger Frenchwoman so enjoyed this incident that her ardor for "Texas" increased. Her escort grew resentful, one thing led to another, and there was a challenge to a duel. The story has an air of improbable melodrama, but Tucker was a respected physician and he reported what followed as fact. As the stage reached a station in northern Texas, the recipient of the challenge, the Texan, chose revolvers as the dueling weapon. With Tucker and the older Frenchman acting as seconds, the duelists went to a corral behind the station. The two foes entered opposite gates, their pistols ready.

In Dr. Tucker's words: "Suddenly the Frenchman dropped his revolver and quickly fired two shots. At the second discharge, 'Texas' half-wheeled to the left and staggered. His exposed left arm was shattered near the wrist. He sprang forward several paces and fired." He missed, the Frenchman shot again, but neither was touched in this exchange. Blood was pouring from the Texan's arm as he approached his enemy; the Frenchman paused and then they fired together. This time, the Frenchman, still unhurt, knocked the Texan's hat off. Tucker continued: "Then 'Texas' dropped upon one knee and, resting his revolver across his wounded arm, fired with deliberate aim. His antagonist was at the moment also in the act of firing, but the Texan's bullet reached his heart before he could press the trigger. Throwing his arms in the air, the Frenchman fell dead!"

Leaving the dead man's friends to cope with his corpse, the rest of the passengers hastily took off. Tucker continued: "The driver had eaten his supper, fresh horses were in harness, and 'Texas' and myself could only seize some food and jump into the coach, as the six wild mustangs started off on a fierce gallop. I also carried off some shingles, to splint the broken arm."

Tucker learned from his driver that the French group were drifting gamblers. He was to hear no more of them, but years later he chanced upon the Texan, who had become a staid and wealthy cattle owner in his native state. Tucker went on to hold a variety of important positions in the California state government. But until the day that he died, in 1891, he considered his stagecoach ride the high point of his long life.

To keep the mail and passengers moving when winter blanketed the Sierra, some coach lines switched to sleighs that could skim over snow where it was packed hard enough to support the horses. In this 1871 sketch by W. H. Hilton two four-horse sled-coaches meet on the Placerville Road.



6 Assembling a behemoth

In April of 1868, crowds turned out all across the country to gawk at a spectacle that provided a climax of sorts to the age of the expressmen. No fewer than 30 new stagecoaches were being shipped on flatcars from the Abbot-Downing factory in Concord, New Hampshire, to a railhead on the Missouri River. The record-breaking shipment had been ordered by Wells, Fargo & Company to expand the already superb service of its far-flung stage empire, which by then had absorbed or

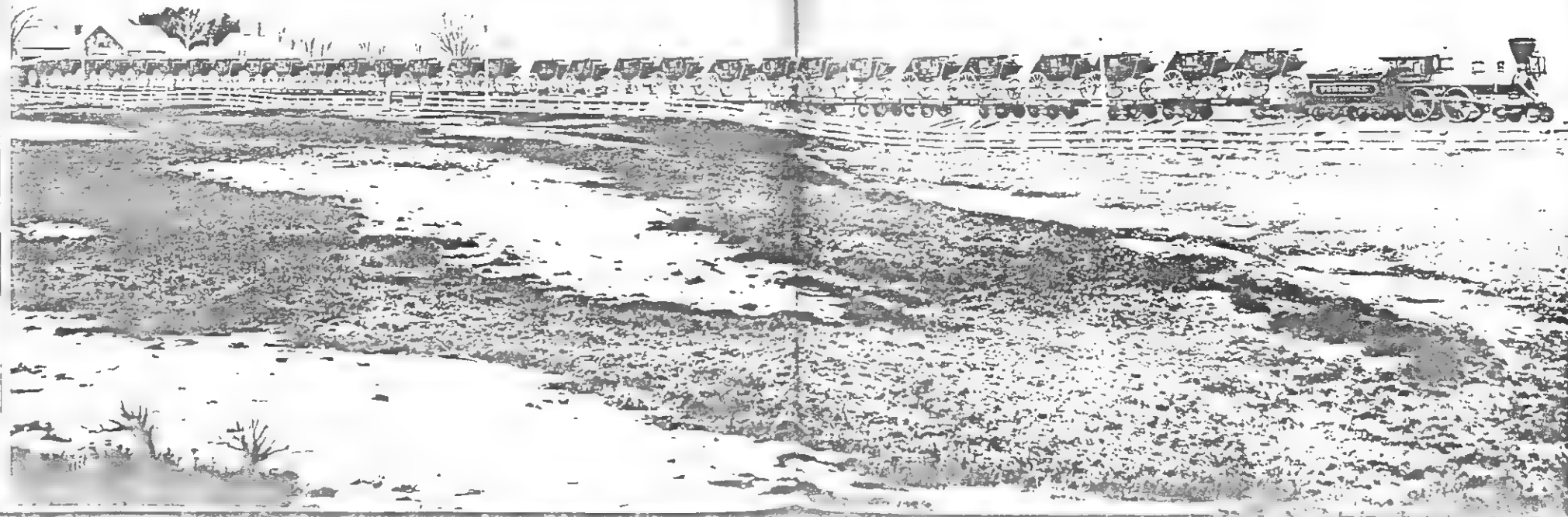
crushed every major competitor west of the Missouri.

Yet staging was just one of many activities of Wells, Fargo. Established in San Francisco in 1852 as a service for delivery of lightweight valuables, the company steadily overspread the West with branch offices manned by efficient, imaginative personnel; at the same time, it moved into all phases of transport. By ship, coach, freight wagon and mule train, its agents delivered practically everything—food, families, fire-fighting

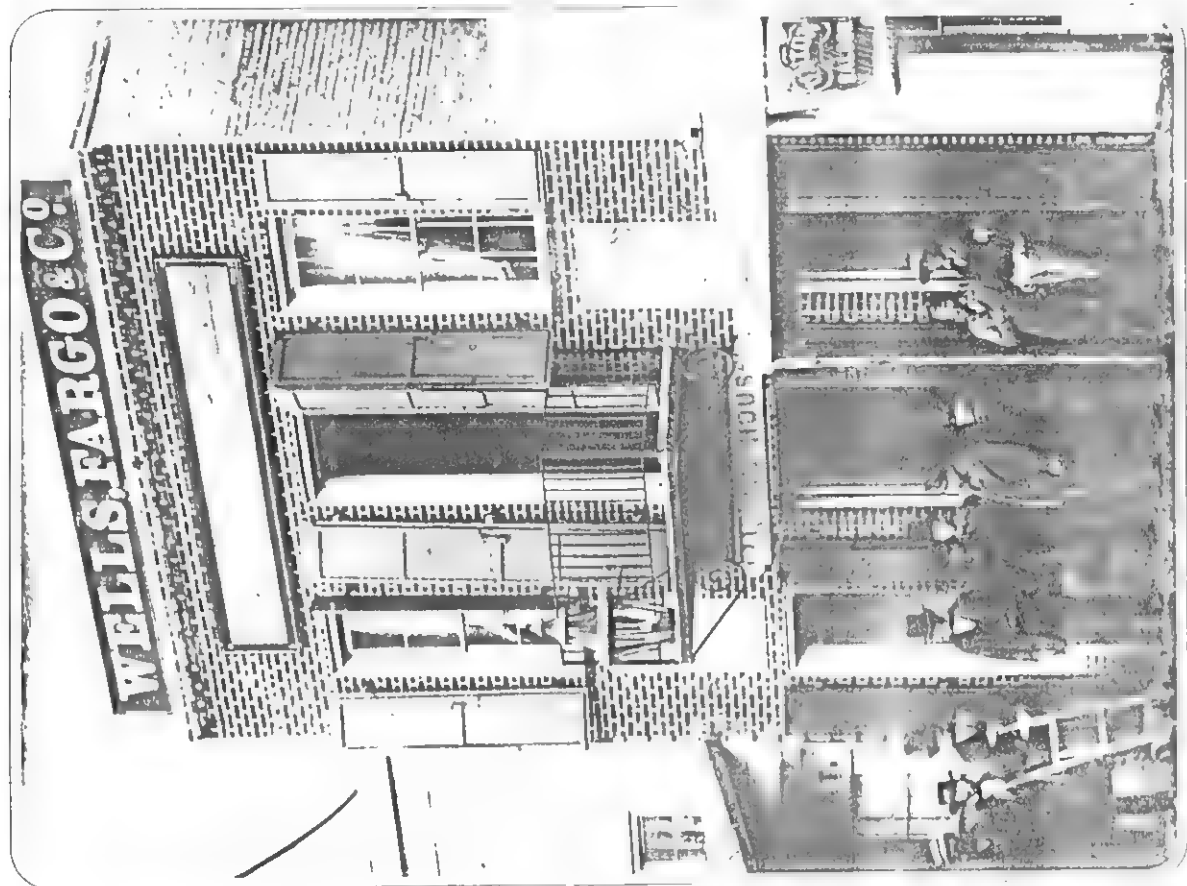
equipment and even fancy ladies—from any point in the world to new towns in the middle of nowhere.

When the 1860s drew toward a close, Wells, Fargo ranked as the biggest, richest and most versatile corporate entity in the West. Soon—sooner than the company's directors guessed—the completion of the transcontinental railroad would deal its staging fleet a heavy blow, but Wells, Fargo switched onto the rails and kept growing with the West that it had served so well.

A piggyback armada of stagecoaches rolls westward in 1868, bound for service under the Wells, Fargo banner.



The Western express that "did almost anything for anybody"



Just about everywhere in the West in the late 1860s travelers were sure to see block-lettered signs that said "Wells, Fargo" and the distinctive green color that was a company trademark. Almost every stagecoach had "Wells, Fargo" blazoned on its elegant curved flank, and a green strongbox hidden inside. A Wells Fargo office, with iron shutters—painted green—at the windows, was the local point of commercial activity in more than 200 towns. Throughout California, Wells Fargo mailboxes—green, of course—stood brazenly beside red boxes labeled U.S. Mail. Wells Fargo green was, obviously, as good as gold.

If a curious visitor from the East chose to ask about Wells Fargo, he was not likely to get a satisfactory answer. Just about every Westerner knew the company's name as well as his own; its success was legendary and its honesty and reliability so proverbial that miners swore "by God and by Wells Fargo." But precisely because the company was so huge, so far-flung and so pre-eminent in so many different activities, no one could sum it up easily. Those who tried usually ended up with some grandiose platitude, like "ready companion of civilization." Possibly the best epitome was delivered by a long-time admirer of the company who wrote:

Wells Fargo went everywhere, did almost anything for anybody, and was the nearest thing to a universal service company ever invented.

Specifically, this "universal service company" was, by the mid-1860s, the West's most important express agency, richest bank, farthest-ranging stage line and one of the largest freighting concerns. Taken as a whole, it was the most powerful institution of any kind in the

West—looming even larger than the U.S. government, whose departments had then only tenuously penetrated the trans-Mississippi frontier.

Wells Fargo served as a sort of surrogate government. Its immense bureaucracy of agents, clerks and messengers handled more mail than the Post Office. Its shotgun guards, seated beside each driver on a career-ing stage, were often the only lawmen for miles around, and they chalked up a remarkable record of capturing highwaymen and recovering loot. The company tempered its exercise of power with enlightened responsibility. It collected relief funds and delivered food and clothing for victims of disasters, such as the great Sacramento fire in the fall of 1852. It helped keep the West informed by distributing out-of-town and Eastern newspapers, free of charge, to local editors for cutting and excerpting. Naturally, editors repaid the favor in good publicity for Wells Fargo, redounding in still more business for the company and still larger dividends—high as 22 per cent a year—for its stockholders.

Steady profits over the long haul—that was Wells Fargo's goal, and one that it richly realized. No other giant company in the field of East-West transportation and communication had managed this feat in 40 years when competition was cutthroat even for meager stop business in isolated frontier towns. Within 5 years of the founding of Wells Fargo in San Francisco in 1852, every one of its major rivals—despite the fact that they had enjoyed hefty government mail subsidies—had been absorbed, bankrupted or forced to quit.

The two businessmen who gave their names to this California-based colossus were Easterners who, notoriously enough, were content to stay in the East at a direct distance of 3,000 miles. Henry Wells made only one inspection visit to the West Coast, and William G. Fargo seems never to have ventured beyond the Mississippi at

Wells Fargo's pioneer winter quarters in the mid-1860s, the company's San Francisco headquarters were on Market Street at 182. The green color—this became a company trademark.

Wells, Fargo founders Henry Wells (left) and William Fargo (right) used acumen gained in the East to build a giant company that controlled virtually all stage lines between the Missouri River and California.



all. Apparently neither partner felt the need to know the West as intimately as their pioneer predecessors had known it. Alexander Todd, hauling miners' mail and gold dust, had learned about the Sierra foothills the hard way. James Birch, driving a ramshackle ranch wagon full of passengers, had come to recognize every rock along the rude trail on which his staging empire got its start. Wells and Fargo, though contemporaries of Todd and Birch, represented a new breed of entrepreneur, much more at home behind a desk than battling the rigors of the frontier. Theirs was a world of ledgers, directors' meetings and corporate maneuverings. Under the banner of Wells, Fargo, adventure was never lacking, but it was left to underlings.

Vermont-born Henry Wells was 35 and experienced as a steamboat operator on the New York waterfront when, in 1841, he went to work as an agent for William Harnden (page 16), founder of the first express firm of them all. After a few months of learning the ropes, Wells left Harnden's employ and teamed up with another expressman, carrying mail and packages between Albany and Buffalo by means of the available stagecoach and rail services. Wells was husky and

broad-shouldered and entirely capable of the physical effort involved, but he also bubbled with shrewd ideas. He soon ensured the success of the new firm with a novel service that brought him customers by word-of-mouth publicity: to the delight of Buffalo's landlocked gourmets, he supplied a local restaurant with fresh Long Island oysters at three dollars a hundred.

By 1843, business was good enough for Wells to hire a messenger to take over his traveling chores—William Fargo, a frugal, hard-working New Yorker. Two profitable years later, Wells made him a partner, and they organized another firm that extended their express service to Cincinnati and Chicago.

Efficiency was the keynote of their expanding operations; they managed to get the job done faster and cheaper than their competitors. They turned a profit delivering letters at six cents each when the U.S. Post Office was charging 25 cents. The Post Office ordered Wells to stop undercutting its rates. He replied with a bold counterproposal: his company would contract to deliver all U.S. mail, anywhere in the nation, for six or even five cents a letter. The Assistant Postmaster General hastily declined the offer, reportedly exclaiming, "Zounds, sir, it would throw 16,000 postmasters out

of office!" but Henry Wells had made his point. The Post Office soon dropped its rates in the East all the way down to three cents a letter.

By 1850, Wells and Fargo were big operators—and eager to get even bigger. The way to do it, they decided, was to merge their two firms with an express company controlled by John Butterfield. At the time, Butterfield's most celebrated venture—operating the first transcontinental stage line over the southern Oxbow Route—was still in the future. When Wells and Fargo approached Butterfield in New York, the proposed merger struck him as a fine idea. The deal was made and the resulting firm was named American Express.

It was an instant giant, and its very name reflected the founders' ambition to make it an all-encompassing, nationwide enterprise. But Wells and Fargo met stubborn resistance from some of their fellow directors on the board. Wells and Fargo wanted American Express to set up a base in California, in order to cash in on the gold riches that had been pouring out of the Mother Lode country since 1849. Customarily, the gold was brought by its finders to a California bank or express company—often one and the same firm—and shipped east to U.S. government mints in Philadelphia and New Orleans to be converted into gold coin, which was then shipped back to the West. For their services as expeditors, express companies levied a charge of from 3 to 5 per cent of the value of the shipment. Just how neat a return this could bring them was evident from the fact that in 1851 alone the total gold shipped east was valued at \$60 million.

Wells and Fargo were fully aware that an American Express operation in California would have to compete with companies already entrenched there, but they cheerfully felt that there would be profits enough to go round. Some of the other directors, Butterfield included, were less optimistic; they hung back, apparently in the belief that the gold bonanza would soon peter out.

Unable to budge them, Wells and Fargo decided to invade California on their own. They saw no reason to relinquish either their positions or their financial stake in American Express, since a connection east of the Mississippi was vital to the plan they had in mind. On March 18, 1852, the two men met at the Astor House Hotel in New York City with seven other financial backers and formed a new express company specifi-

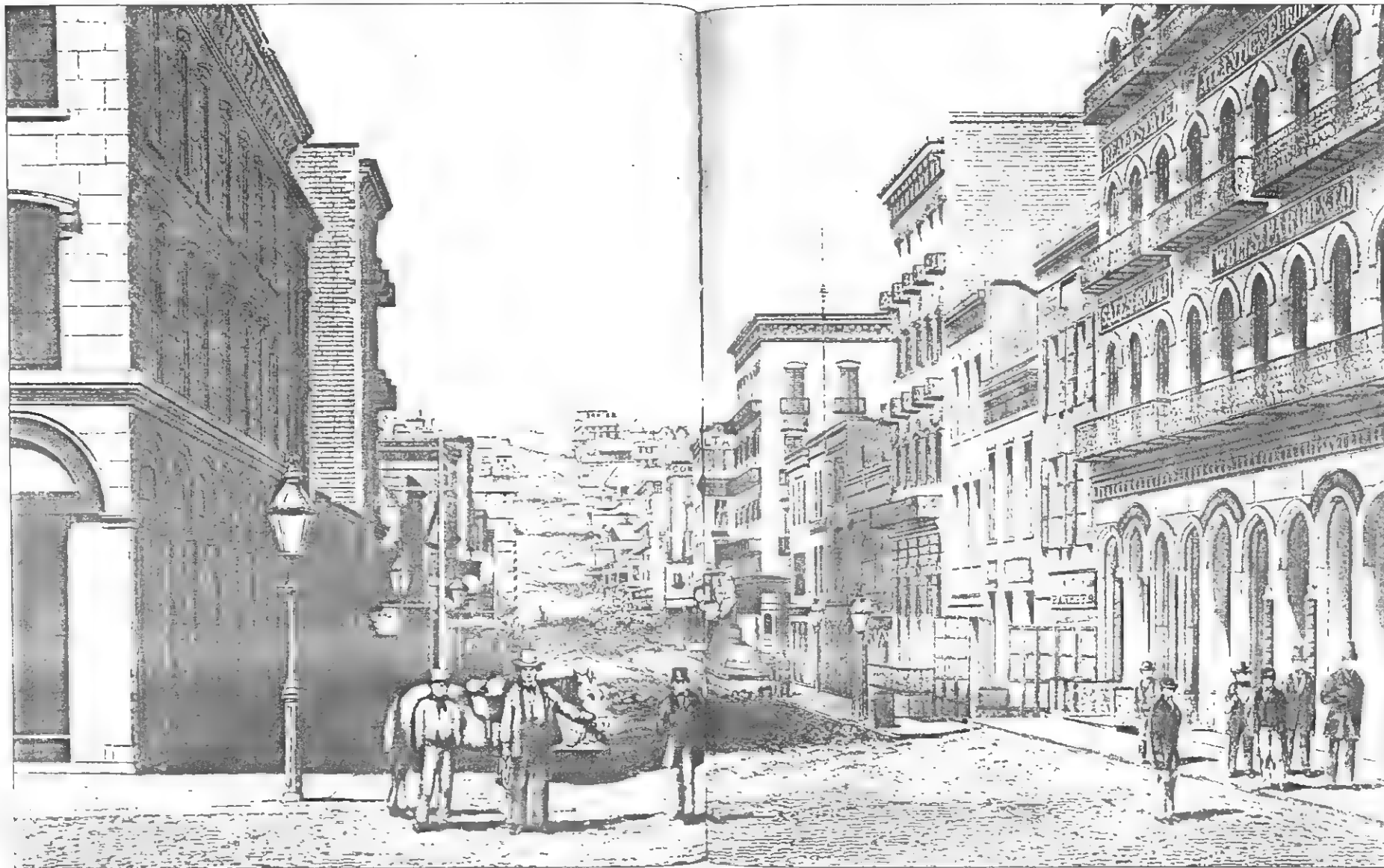
cally to serve California and the Western frontier. The new concern, capitalized at \$300,000, was christened Wells, Fargo & Company.

Wells and Fargo acted with their characteristic swiftness. Less than four months later, early in July, two carefully selected agents—one to oversee banking services and one in charge of express services—opened the first Wells, Fargo office in a narrow red-brick building at 114 Montgomery Street in San Francisco. The red of the brick made a striking contrast to the green of the iron window shutters, which had been specially cast in Brooklyn and sent by ship to California. It may have been Wells, Fargo's founders themselves who thought up this added touch of decor. In any case, it caught the fancy of San Francisco's citizens, who also liked what they saw inside the building: a neat, well-planned office with an array of strongboxes standing ready to receive consignments of gold.

By the following February, when Wells paid his one and only visit to check on the operation and inspect the office and the books, business was off to a good start. Wells briefly surveyed the California scene, commented that "This is a great country and a greater people," and soon departed on his return sea voyage homeward. The lieutenants he left behind must have been pleasantly surprised: in an era of rampant individualism, most employers tended to be domineering and interfering, playing a hunches that were sometimes brilliant but just as often disastrous. Wells had manifestly given his men in the West a resounding vote of confidence. Everyday operations were to be left entirely in the charge of capable and well-financed managers, while the directors of the company remained back in the East and planned their strategy for expansion.

Though the prospect of profits on gold shipments was the lure that had brought Wells, Fargo west, the company made clear from the start that it saw few limits to the services it could lucratively render. It ticked them off in an advertisement in San Francisco's leading daily, the *Alta California*:

"Wells, Fargo is now ready to undertake a general express-forwarding agency and commission business: the purchase and sale of gold dust, bullion and bank exchange; the payment and collection of notes, bills and accounts; the forwarding of gold dust, bullion and specie; also packages, parcels and freight of all descriptions.



San Francisco's Montgomery Street, financial heart of the West, was the site of successive Wells Fargo headquarters. In 1854 the firm occupied the building on the right, and in 1866 it moved across to the Peck Building, which was then home of the rival Adams & Co.

A young agent's "days long to be remembered"

The Wells, Fargo representative was a big man in any community, in more ways than one. "You are aware that I am an Agent of the House of Wells, Fargo & Co., an express and banking house of a half-million dollars' capital and unbounded credit," 21-year-old John Q. Jackson wrote home from Auburn, California. "My position," he assured his father back in Virginia in 1852, "throws me in contact with the heaviest business men of the state — Bankers, Lawyers, Judges, Merchants & all do business through us. The office is my passport to any society in which I may choose to move and withal is one of good profit."

The proud letter writer was Wells, Fargo's first agent in Auburn, seat of gold-rich Placer County. Jackson had left home at 18 and sailed around the Horn to join the 1849 gold rush. When he found prospecting "Getting rather dull," he established general stores at Ophir and Bear Creek, California, served as an election official and was appointed a postmaster before joining Wells, Fargo in 1852.

It was a grueling seven-day-a-week job, busiest on Sundays. "What I have to do is quite confining," he wrote his brother, "staying in my office all day till 10 at night buying dust, forwarding & receiving packages of every kind, from and to everywhere — filling out drafts for the Eastern Mails in all sorts of sums and drawing checks on the Offices below, when men wish to take money to the cities." Gold dust had to be cleaned, weighed, sealed and packed for forwarding. Books had to be balanced. Incoming letters had to be sorted, out-



Agent Jackson at age 24

going letters had to be listed for the messenger who left at daybreak.

But the compensations were ample. "I might have stayed in Virginia," he told his brother, "and never had \$1,000 entrusted to me or been worth anything myself." Now he had a "handsome" monthly income, of which part came from the 25-cent fee he collected for himself on every letter he picked up at the post office for forwarding by Wells, Fargo.

Social opportunities, by virtue of Jackson's position, were enticing. "I returned from a ball a few days ago after spending a very pleasant night in company with the First ladies of the County," he wrote to his father. And later he added: "There are some very fascinating married ladies here, one of whom might possibly slope [sic] with me should I [illegible] the matter."

Most satisfying of all, perhaps, Jackson had gained "the utmost con-

fidence of the 'Heads' of the Concern in San Francisco & Sacramento." His performance during the panic of 1855 proved their confidence was merited.

"Yesterday & today," he wrote his father on February 24, 1855, "have been days long to be remembered by me. On the night of the 22nd I was present at a ball . . . where I remained until 4 a.m. At 8 o'clock I was awoke by a messenger handing me a telegraphic dispatch to the effect that Adams Co. had failed to prepare for a run. I instantly got up & at the moment I reached the door crowds were running towards the office. I knew that our funds would not meet all our outstanding draft certificates. Very soon Adams Co. here had paid out all their funds and still were short some \$20,000. The crowd were now furious. I saw no other plan but to open [the office] and let it [cash on hand] go as far as it would — paying out commenced and the work got pretty warm. I made arrangements for funds to the amount of all the demands against us — the time ran smoothly till about 4 p.m. when it was telegraphed that Wells, Fargo & Co. had suspended in San Francisco. This felt like a death knell to me but as far as this office was concerned I could weather it. Soon the paying out was lively — but as there seemed to be no lack of funds and my giving assurance of their safety all was quieted for the day. This morning I received a dispatch from the San Francisco Office that their house would open on Monday next & I am in hopes that we will go through the storm safely. This is the proudest time of my life."

An ornate document, designed to be "conspicuously posted," certifies the appointment of Eugene Shelby as the Portland, Oregon, agent of Wells, Fargo in 1884. The position made him a leading citizen.



ridgepole. Just that simply, he was open for business.

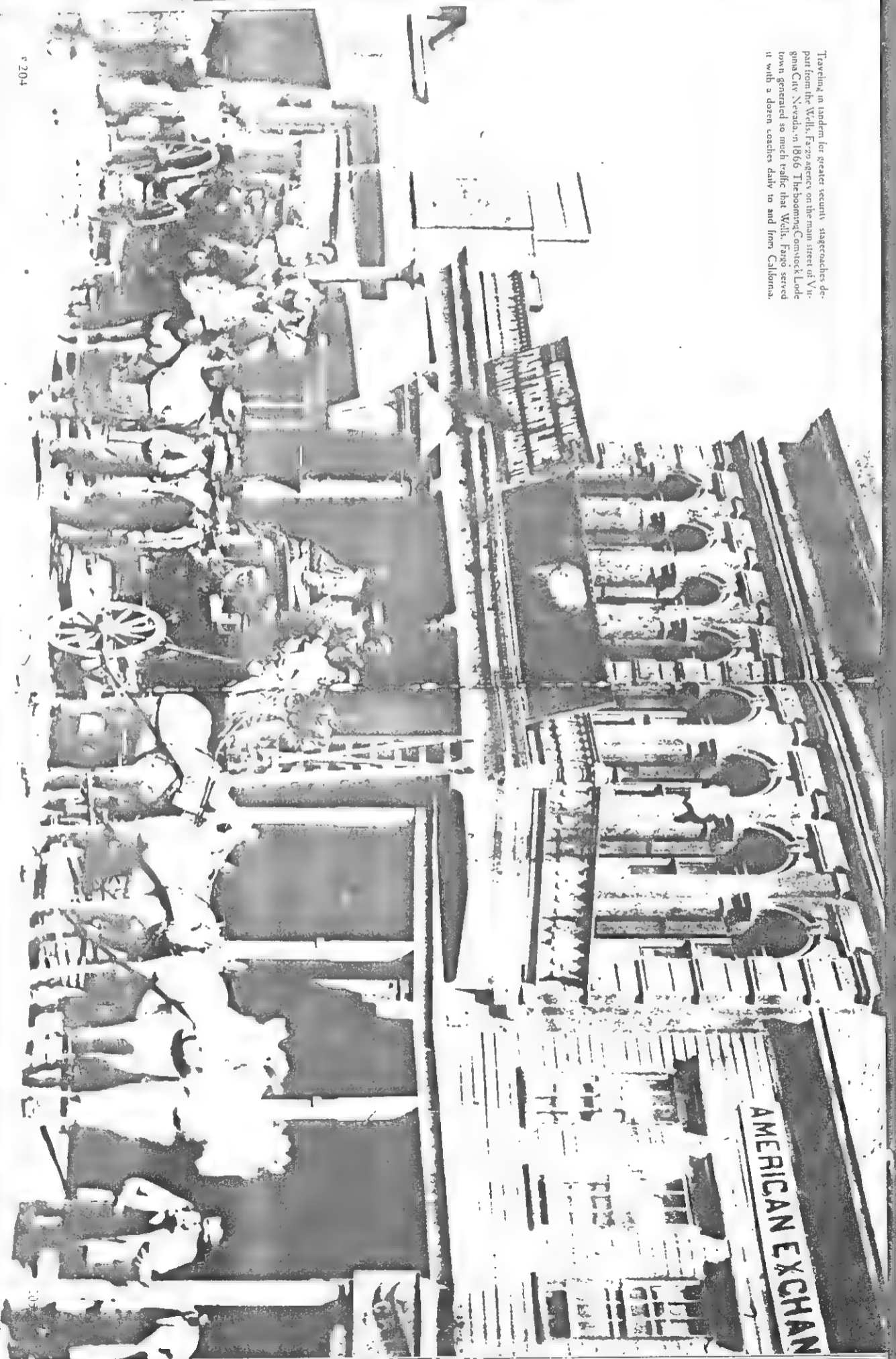
Though the company sometimes adopted its rivals' practice of taking office space in a hotel, Wells, Fargo preferred to construct its own buildings in mining towns that seemed likely to last. If the building was made of wood, it was fairly certain to burn down sooner or later: fires were endemic in the new towns. In Grass Valley, California, only the office vault and its precious contents survived a fire in 1855; while the fire was still smoldering, the Wells, Fargo agent, an indomitable character named Alonzo Delano, picked up a flimsy shed and moved it by wagon to the ruin, positioned it in front of the site and was back in business in a week.

In places with proven diggings of gold, Wells, Fargo usually did its building or rebuilding with fireproof brick.

And when the inevitable green shutters arrived to provide the final touch, the miners knew that Wells, Fargo was there to stay, that their town was truly established and their links to the outside world indissoluble.

In brand-new digs the welcome accorded to Wells, Fargo was invariably jubilant. Charles Blake, who had gone to work for the company as a young Yale graduate in 1853, considered himself an unflappable veteran when, 10 years later, he journeyed to Idaho to open an office in a new mining camp near the Boise River. Yet Blake was dumfounded by the tumultuous greeting he received. He and his traveling companions reined their mules to a halt among a throng of miners who were busy cutting shingles for new buildings. Then, as Blake reported, "One of the crowd said to our guide,

Traveling in tandem for greater security, stagecoaches depart from the Wells, Fargo agency on the main street of Virginia City, Nevada, in 1866. The booming Comstock Lode town generated so much traffic that Wells, Fargo served it with a dozen coaches daily to and from California.



This gold ingot, shown full size, was worth \$325 when Wells, Fargo had it smelted in 1854. It was cast from about 16 ounces of gold dust that miners all over the West brought into Wells, Fargo express offices.

'Can you tell us anything about Wells, Fargo & Company? We understood that they were going to establish an agency here.' 'Yes,' says the guide, 'they are, and that man in spectacles is the agent.'

"The next instant," Blake went on, "I heard a shout taken up and repeated through the whole town. 'Wells, Fargo have come!' In less than three minutes I was surrounded by an excited crowd of two or three hundred men, who hardly allowed me time to get my saddle off my mule before they dragged me into a large unfinished building on the Plaza, as they called the square. The carpenters were at work, but were stopped at once, the shavings were cleaned out, one man ran for a whisky keg to make me a stool and another brought in scales and a yeast powder box to put gold dust in and installed himself to weigh for me."

The miners had further cause for joy when Blake produced about 400 letters he had brought and called them out to the rightful recipients. "The crowd increased," Blake reported, "and for eight mortal hours my tongue had to wag without cessation. I disposed of a great many letters at a dollar apiece, and about eight o'clock at night broke up business in spite of the crowd."

Blake's varied duties as agent were typical of Wells, Fargo routine in every branch. He stayed close to the office much of the time to assay gold dust as miners brought it in; he might buy the dust outright for coin, or accept it as a bank deposit against which the miner could draw checks for a service charge of one fifteenth of 1 per cent a day. Almost every day Blake and his assistants melted down the accumulated gold dust and cast it into bars for convenient transport to the mints. By now the federal government had opened a mint in San Francisco to reduce the time and cost involved in shipping the metal back East to be turned into currency, and at intervals Blake's fund of coins was replenished. He also received bags of letters to distribute and bundles of newspapers to sell.

Between waiting on miners, preparing his outbound mail, writing waybills for outgoing shipments of gold

and parcels and doing the bookkeeping involved, Blake was kept busy until nine in the evening at least twice a week. And, as he reported, "One day when we had a big rush I did not finish my work until four o'clock next morning."

Blake had no chance in Idaho to perform any of those flamboyant feats of service that did so much to puff up Wells, Fargo's fame, but other agents filled the breach. One Wells, Fargo man escorted a fire-fighting wagon all the way from Baltimore by ship to San Francisco, then drove it inland and delivered it safely to its purchaser, the fire-prone city of Sacramento. Another agent

arranged to keep the sporting houses in Virginia City supplied with fresh talent; as new girls began arriving, townsmen turned out eagerly to greet each incoming Wells, Fargo stage.

Thanks also to Wells, Fargo, silver- and gold-rich miners enjoyed an endless influx of culinary delicacies. Just as Henry Wells had once successfully delivered oysters to Buffalo, so his company continued to provide the Nevada and California treasure towns with firkins of reasonably fresh butter from Vermont and with wines and *paté de foie gras* all the way from France. Wells, Fargo even shipped Californians cigars from Germany and cuttings of grapevines from Switzerland—the start of a local wine industry.

For these sensational feats, as well as in its more customary concerns, Wells, Fargo used every available mode and route of transport: steamers to San Francisco around the Horn or by way of the Panama portage; Sacramento River boats; local California railroad cars on the Sacramento-to-Folsom line; heavy freight wagons and light express wagons to haul supplies; mule trains to carry freight and mail where wagons could not go; even men on snowshoes to get mail through mountain buzzards. But the major means of transport the company employed was the stagecoach, whose speed best served the needs of overland express.

Yet, until 1860, Wells, Fargo's position in staging was anomalous. Logically, a company of such varied

and sprawling enterprises should by now have owned a great fleet of coaches and operated its own far-flung stage lines. Wells, Fargo did own some feeder lines; but for the most part it sent its express shipments via the coaches of other carriers, notably the California Stage Company, the mammoth concern consolidated by James Birch. California Stage controlled all but a relatively small fraction of the state's staging business, and Wells, Fargo scrupulously avoided any semblance of competing with Birch's firm.

In 1860, however, two events occurred which were to plunge Wells, Fargo willy-nilly into staging, and transform it almost overnight into a giant in the field. One of these unexpected developments stemmed directly from Louis McLane's fascination with horses. An expert rider himself, he had inevitably acquired a parallel interest in staging. He did nothing concrete about it until, in 1860, he learned of the impending

sale of the Pioneer Stage Company, whose coaches plied the Sierra between Placerville, California, and Carson Valley, Nevada. Acquiring Pioneer was not only a potential dream come true for McLane, but an irresistible investment. The Comstock Lode, near Pioneer's Nevada terminus, had been discovered only the year before and was pouring forth untold riches in silver—all of which had to be transported to banks and mints, at a substantial fee for the carrier.

With his brother as partner, McLane bought Pioneer. He did not feel it necessary to give up his position at Wells, Fargo, nor did the company feel the need to deprive itself of his talents. A mutually beneficial arrangement was made whereby Wells, Fargo shipments rode Pioneer stages to and from Nevada and the two firms shared offices. In a few years Wells, Fargo was to buy Pioneer from the McLanes, though still discreetly keeping the fact a secret lest it annoy



A stagecoach strongbox measuring about two feet by one by one was painted Wells, Fargo's inevitable green—and had to wait

In this *Police Gazette* recreation of a Wells, Fargo stage holdup in Nevada in 1866, highwaymen plunder a pair of coaches while one gallant bandit offers a female passenger a seat off to the side.



competing stage lines whose services it might occasionally require.

The other momentous event of 1860 was to take Wells, Fargo much further afield in staging. It involved an old friend and onetime financial cohort of Henry Wells and William Fargo—John Butterfield. By now Butterfield's celebrated stage line on the long Osbow Route across the southern part of the country was in deep trouble. Despite his zeal and efficiency, and despite a \$500,000, a-year government mail contract, the expense of upkeep and repairs along the meandering,

perilous route was impossibly high to deliver each letter he carried. Butterfield once morosely figured, cost his company more than \$60 apiece. Wells, Fargo had made a number of loans to help keep Butterfield going, but his inability to repay strained and finally snapped the friendship. In March 1860, Wells, Fargo took control of the Butterfield Overland Mail and summarily disposed its founder.

A year later, on the eve of the outbreak of civil war, history played into Wells, Fargo's hands. When Confederate irregulars cut the Osbow Route and Wash-

ington ordered the stage line moved northward to the safer central route. Wells, Fargo suddenly found itself the prime stage operator on the western end of the only remaining transcontinental link, lying in with the C.O.C. & P. at Salt Lake City. Once committed to staging, Wells, Fargo spent lavishly—but the expenditures were amply justified: the western part of the central overland route was bullion-rich territory, offering great profit to the line that transported the treasure.

Still, this latest undertaking by Wells, Fargo was not without its troubles. Most of them stemmed from the operators of the eastern part of the central overland route—the 1,200-mile stretch linking Salt Lake City and Missouri River towns. The first operator with whom Wells, Fargo had to contend was the perennial promoter, William Russell, then dreaming the last of his dreams of glory and nearing the end of his rope. When Russell's operation foundered, the man who took over was even less palatable to Wells, Fargo's hard-working officials. Russell at least had personal charm; Ben Holladay was all gall.

Without full cooperation between the operators of the eastern and western parts of the central overland route, any claim of providing travelers with an uninterrupted journey clear across the continent was at least dubious. Wells, Fargo was willing to cooperate. It took over management of the western end of the Pony Express—Russell's prized scheme for proving the utility of the central overland route—before the Pony itself was noised out by the East-West telegraph. Wells, Fargo collaborated with Holladay as well: the passengers and packages and mail his stage line delivered to its terminus at Salt Lake City were carried further westward in Wells, Fargo's charge.

To Holladay, however, cooperation was a distasteful concept. The fact that Wells, Fargo stages commanded one part of the overland route did not prevent him from charging stiff rates for Wells, Fargo express matter that traveled over his part of the route. Louis McLane, still ensconced as Wells, Fargo's Western manager, could not abide Holladay. In turn, McLane's annoyance—he was capable of calling any one who dared with him an "egregious ass"—incensed Holladay. The hard feelings were reinforced by invasions of new, better-equipped lines that lured Wells, Fargo's service and condemned Holladay's, complaining that he charged

too much for passenger fares, took poor care of his equipment and animals and generally was running his stage line into the ground.

In this climate of acrimony, Wells, Fargo's directors were understandably stunned when, in 1866, Holladay abruptly allowed them to buy him out. What made him do so was his own secret: he had simply read the handwriting on the wall and decided that staging would not long survive the completion of the oncoming transcontinental rail link. But Wells, Fargo leaped at the chance Holladay offered and paid \$1,500,000 in cash and stock for his stage line. Only after a few years' experience would the directors discover that because of growing rail competition along Holladay's part of the overland route, their net profits showed a reduction of about \$80,000 a year. But for the moment the directors had valid reasons to congratulate themselves. They had realized the dream of William Russell and the other great expressmen: they now possessed a monopoly on long-distance staging and mail service west of the Missouri River.

In 1866 the West was Wells, Fargo's oyster. The company had 196 branch offices, and business was bigger and better than ever. Wells, Fargo's other stage line, Pioneer, had grown explosively with the silver boom around Virginia City; it now ran four stages daily in both directions between there and Placerville. (McLane saw to it that the mountainous route was scraped of snow in the winter to keep it passable, and waited in the summer to keep it smooth and dust-free.) As far as Wells, Fargo's directors could see, the only cloud on their corporate horizon was a minor one, though a vexing problem for staging entrepreneurs—the growing trouble with robbers.

Back in the early gold rush days of 1849, expressman Alexander Todd had carried an old butter keg filled with \$150,000 in gold dust some 70 miles to San Francisco without benefit of gun or guard, certain that everyone was so busy trying to survive and strike it rich that no one had the time or inclination to attempt to rob a traveler. But that atmosphere had changed as California grew more populous, wealthier and more—or less—civilized.

The first robberies had been small affairs, annoyingly because the new mining towns were just starting

At Camp, Oregon, 1890. The author, standing, with a group of men, including the author's son, in front of a wagon. The photograph was taken by the author, and is a reproduction of the original in the collection of the National Archives and Records Administration.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY
WASHINGTON, D.C.
1890



As Wells, Fargo's chief detective for 32 years, James B. Hume hunted down hundreds of stage and train robbers by combining new methods such as ballistics analysis with dogged pursuit of his quarry



to produce treasure. At this point, thieves seemed to provoke more amusement than indignation. In 1859 the Wells, Fargo agent in Sonora, California, was about to retire for the night on his bunk at the back of the office when he heard a suspicious noise. The agent, Canfield by name, searched the area and finally looked under his bed. There he spied a man who was armed with an ax. Unarmed himself, Canfield dashed outside to look for help, and the would-be bandit escaped. The *Stockton Argus* reported the nonevent with a stramed pun: "We apprehend that that fellow intended to ax Canfield for his money."

Soon, however, robbery ceased to be a joke. Stage holdups increased, and sometimes were pulled off by entire gangs. Often the bandits waited in hiding at the top of a steep grade, where the tired stage horses had slowed to a walk. One bandit, with his confederates covering him from the brush, would step or ride his horse into the path of the oncoming stagecoach brandishing a double-barreled shotgun. Then he would call out an order that before long became all too familiar: "Throw

Five of Hume's colleagues gather to mark the capture of the celebrated bandit Black Bart. The sheriff of Calaveras County, California, poses (center) with an ax like the one Bart used to smash money chests.

down the box!" — the green Wells, Fargo treasure chest.

Bullion coming down from the mines in the mountains was the main prize; at first robbers rarely molested passengers or stage men. When one brigand with an innovative turn of mind ordered everyone aboard a stage to empty his pockets, the driver roared angrily. "You are the meanest man I ever saw in the business. There never was a driver before who was asked to give up a cent." The bandit, thoroughly abashed by the scolding, returned the driver's money.

Wells, Fargo suffered its first road robbery near Shasta in 1855—a holdup of a mule train. A gang led by the notorious bandit Rattlesnake Dick, so-called because he had launched his career of crime in the California mining camp of Rattlesnake Bar, made off with \$80,000 in gold dust. Rattlesnake Dick was eventually killed in a shoot-out near Auburn in 1859, about the same time that real rattlesnakes came into use as an improvised method of bandit control. The idea was to stash a live rattler inside the treasure box; the robbers might get the gold, but with it they would also get a nasty surprise.

Holdups became so commonplace that Wells, Fargo printed up a standard form for use as a "stage robbery report," with blanks for the agent to fill in with the details. The epidemic of holdups had Californians enraged and ready for vigilante action. After three local stagecoach robberies within one week, the *Yreka Union* printed a thinly veiled threat: "This is getting somewhat monotonous for the people of Shasta County and we expect to hear, about the next thing, that some highway men have been seriously hurt."

Wells, Fargo went to work on the bandit problem in every conceivable way. Treasure chests consigned to transport by stage were bolted down to the floor boards of the coach or built into passenger seats. But even a bolted strongbox could be opened, and so the company took pains to conceal its plans when particularly big shipments were due to go out. A gold shipment from Sonora worth \$190,000 remained a perfect secret—until the stage hit a rut. The weight of the gold broke the coach frame in half, and a stream of gold dust spewed out onto the roadway.

To protect stages carrying bullion from Comstock country—popular targets of robbers—Wells, Fargo put not only a shotgun guard on the box beside the driver,



A Wells, Fargo reward poster for the robber Black Bart presents facsimiles of the handwritten doggerel he tauntingly left in the treasure boxes he plundered. Bart signed his verses as "the Po8," meaning poet.

Agents of W. F. & Co. will not post this circular, but place them in the hands of your local and county officers, and reliable citizens in your region. Officers and citizens receiving them are respectfully requested to preserve them for future reference.

Agents WILL PRESERVE a copy on file in their office.

\$800.00 Reward!

ARREST STAGE ROBBER!

1. On the 3d of August, 1877, the stage from Fort Ross to Russian River was stopped by one man, who took from the Express box about \$300. coin, and a check for \$305.52, on Grangers' Bank of San Francisco, in favor of Fisk Bros. The Mail was also robbed. On one of the Way Bills left with the box the Robber wrote as follows:—

"I've labored long and hard for bread—
For honor and for riches—
But on my corns too long you've trod,
You fine haired sons of bitches

BLACK BART, the Po8.

Driver, give my respects to our friend, the other driver; but I really had a notion to hang my old disguise hat on his weather eye." (for smile)

Respectfully B. Bart

It is believed that he went to the Town of Guerneville about daylight next morning.

2. About one year after above robbery, July 25th, 1878 the Stage from Quincy to Oroville was stopped by one man, and W. F. & Co's box robbed of \$379. coin, one Diamond Ring, (said to be worth \$200) one Silver Watch, valued at \$25. The Mail was also robbed. In the box, when found next day, was the following, (for smile):—

here I lay me down to sleep
to wait the coming morn'g
perhaps success perhaps defeat
And everlasting sorrow
I've labored long and hard for bread
for honor and for riches
But on my corns too long you've trod
You fine haired sons of bitches
let come what will I'll try it on
My condition isn't too bad
and if there's money in that bag
It's munny in my purse
Black Bart
The Po8

but another on top of the coach and two more riding on horseback 50 yards to the rear. That maneuver helped, and so did an idea that originated with some California shippers who had their silver smelted and cast into forms too heavy for robbers to carry off. One smelter turned out silver cannonballs that weighed 700 pounds each. Another poured almost a ton of silver and gold into an immense ingot which he inscribed, appropriately enough, "Champion."

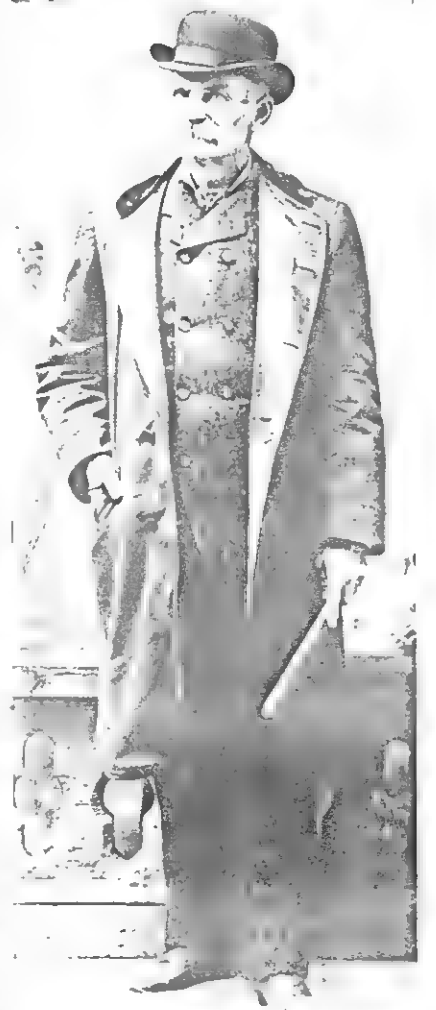
As holdups continued virtually unchecked into the 1860s, Wells, Fargo built up a large force of private detectives and police. Company pride demanded the expenditure: it was a matter of living up to its unofficial watchword, "Wells, Fargo never forgets." (It first appeared—so the story goes—on the tombstone of a bandit hanged in Virginia City.) The force proved to be a sound—if heavy—investment. It was company policy to reimburse shippers for any gold stolen while in Wells, Fargo's care; and in 14 years, the losses from 313 robberies totaled \$415,000. In the same period, the company paid out roughly an equal amount in salaries and operating expenses for its police and detectives. Still, it reaped the satisfaction of knowing that they had not only recovered large amounts of loot, but had thwarted 34 stage holdups and captured and secured the conviction of 240 bandits.

Wells, Fargo's plague of robbers was finally brought under control by James B. Hume, a cigar-loving native of New York's Catskill Mountains who had racked up an impressive record of arrests as a peace officer in California and Nevada.

In 1873, Hume, then 46 years old, went to work for the company as chief of detectives. Patient and diligent, as orderly as Wells, Fargo itself in his approach to his business, Hume believed in law-book law rather than Western gun law. To make sure that the bandits he apprehended were convicted on solid evidence when they reached court, he pioneered in the science of ballistics and other new methods of crime detection.

Hume was a big man who tried to make himself inconspicuous under a black felt hat. Out of personal reticence and professional discretion, he shunned publicity, declined interviews and avoided the limelight. On one occasion when Hume found himself—to his annoyance—in a discussion of his own successes, he merely made

Finally betrayed by a laundry mark on a handkerchief in 1883, Black Bart was revealed as a natty little gentleman named Charles Boles who lived quietly in San Francisco between forays against the



"And there, and scattered around the pages of chief detective Hume's 'black book' of bandits who were arrested for crimes against Wells, Fargo. The roster typifies Hume's systematic sleuthwork.



Ramon Ruiz
Robbed Stage in Butte &
Calaveras Co. in 1875 & 76
with Old Joaquin & others



Antone Savage
Robbed Stages in Calaveras Co
in 1875 & 76 with Ruiz and
"Big & Little Mike"



Jim Baker
Robbed Stage in Calaveras Co
in 1875 & 76 with Joaquin
Ruiz and others



Harry Yorkov
Robbed Stage from La Porte
to Oroville July 20-1876
with John Doe

the laconic rejoinder, "My salary has been increased from time to time."

Hume's most famous case involved Black Bart, a masked bandit who punningly called himself the "Po8" (poet), for the doggerel he composed. Bart's intelligence and style made him a worthy adversary for Hume. To make the contest even more fascinating to the public at large, Bart never stole much gold (a total of only

\$18,000 in 28 or 29 holdups) and not once did anyone physical harm.

Apart from breaking the law, the real offense that Bart committed was to wound Wells, Fargo's pride. And he kept rubbing salt in the wound. The spectacle of a lone man outwitting a business colossus endeared him to everyone who worked hard for low wages and watched others grow rich. As events proved, it was

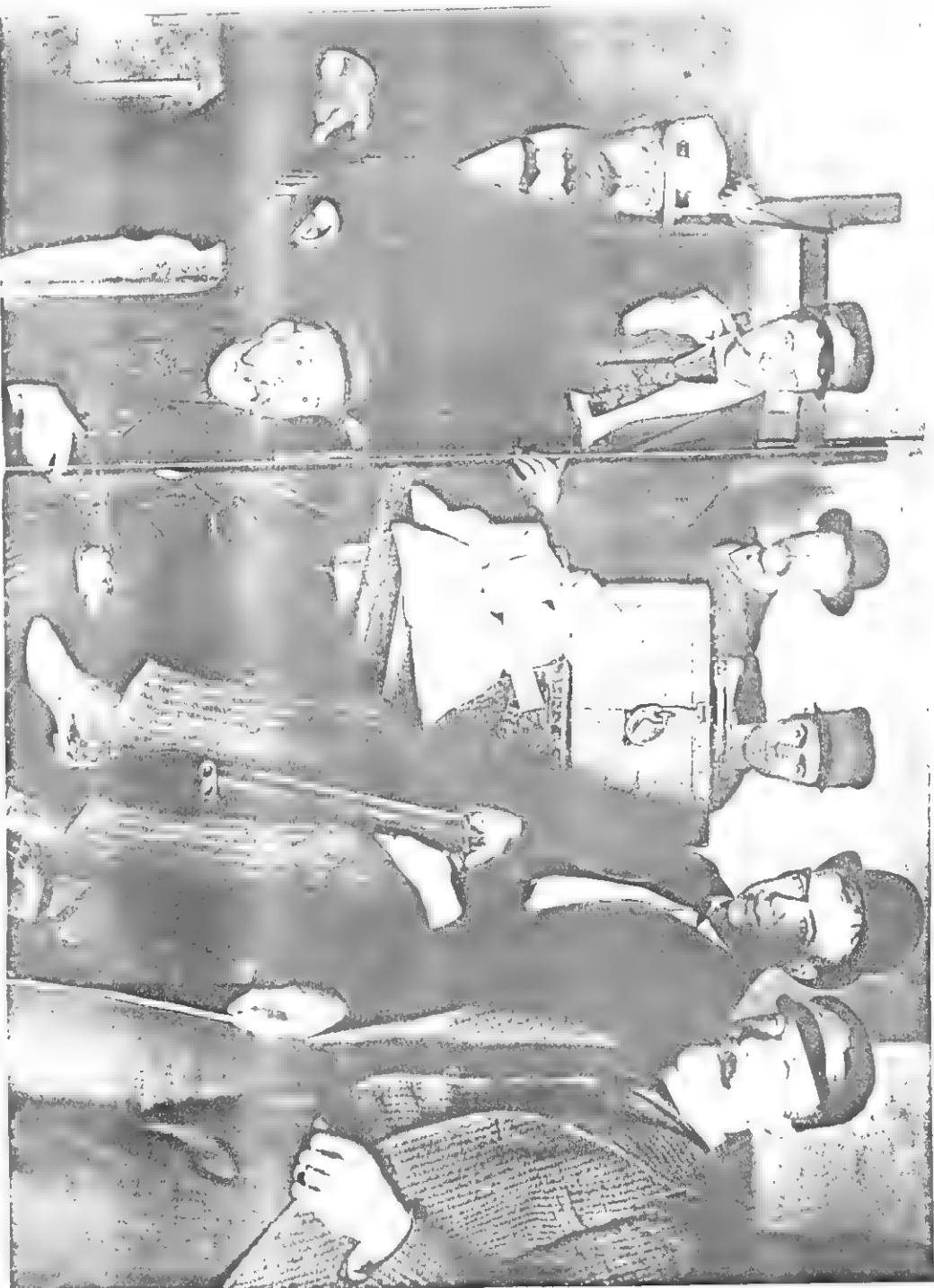
bery. Stage driver Reason McConnell was making his regular run. Alongside of him on the box was a young friend, Jimmy Rollet, who was going hunting. As the stage started up the hill the boy dropped off to scout the woods for game, planning to meet the coach on the far side. Near the top of the hill Black Bart stepped into the road with his shotgun leveled. McConnell stopped. As it happened, the Wells Fargo treasure box was bolted to the floor of the carriage. The bandit ordered McConnell to unhitch the horses and take them over the hill so he could do his plundering at leisure. He then climbed into the coach to chop open the box.

By the time he finished, Jimmy Rollet had rejoined McConnell. The driver, having surrendered his rifle to Bart, grabbed the boy's rifle and fired twice at the man as he backed out of the stage. McConnell missed both times, whereupon Rollet snatched his rifle back, saying, "I'll get him and I won't kill him either." He fired and hit the fleeing bandit. Bart stumbled, dropping something but keeping a grip on the gold, then scrambled up again and disappeared into the brush.

When detective Hume arrived on the scene he found the ground littered with belongings he recognized as Black Bart's. They included field glasses, a derby hat, a razor and a knotted handkerchief full of buckshot. Not one of the items seemed to offer an identifying clue — until a closer look at the handkerchief revealed a faint laundry mark: F.N.O. 7.

Hume checked laundries in a dozen towns before he found one in San Francisco that recognized the mark. It belonged to a certain Charles E. Bolton, apparently a prosperous mining man who made regular trips to San Francisco and while there stayed at the Webb House hotel. A Wells Fargo detective, Harry Morse, persuaded the laundry owner to accompany him to the hotel to see if Bolton was there. As they approached, Bolton stepped out of a doorway and spoke to the laundryman, who introduced him to Morse.

Quietly scrutinizing the stranger, Morse saw that he neatly fit the physical description Hume had constructed, though hardly the scruffy sartorial image. Morse described him as "elegantly dressed, carrying a little cane. He wore a navy blue derby hat, a diamond pin, a large diamond ring on his little finger and a heavy gold watch and chain. He was about five feet eight inches in height, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered with deep, un-



Railroad cars on three Wells Fargo "express" trains in a Reno, Nevada, office. The new era of the express business, the gold, silver, and a strong demand that the risks have not diminished.

One of the most elusive bandits who preyed on Wells, Fargo rail shipments, John Sontag lies mortally wounded in a haystack near Visalia, California, as his captives gather triumphantly around him. When the posse cornered him, Sontag was sheltered by local farmers hostile to the railway.



company exclusive express rights on the railroad. That arrangement terminated the short life of Pacific Express and guaranteed that Wells, Fargo would survive.

Tevie had more news for the directors. Wells, Fargo's unhorsed and railless plight—together with the losses it had suffered in its rate war with Tevie's express—had sent the company's stock plummeting from \$100 a share to as low as \$13, and Tevie had quietly been buying it up at the depressed prices. In the room in Omaha, the directors were forced to concede that Lloyd Tevie now controlled Wells, Fargo.

In time, Wells, Fargo customers—the people of the West—concluded with relief that the new regime was determined to preserve the virtues of the old. The company they had trusted, relied on and believed in was still intact, with its sound brick buildings and strong vaults, its honest scales and efficient agents. Now, of course, the company rode the rails. But Wells, Fargo itself still delivered the goods, attracted the treasure and continued to grow.

Yet in some ways Wells, Fargo had changed, for the West itself was changing rapidly. Wells, Fargo became a California firm in 1870, when Lloyd Tevie transferred its headquarters from New York to San Francisco. That was a move of symbolic importance, reflecting the maturity that the West had acquired in a period of just two decades.

Many other things had changed in that time. Alexander Todd had plodded the Sierra foothills alone, hauling letters up to miners and bringing gold down. Alexander Majors had ridden the overland trail with his freight-wagon trains, supping with his bullock drivers by a buffalo-chip fire and sleeping on the ground. Those years the West was only a scattering of settlements in the wilderness, isolated from everything but hope. But Todd and Majors and men like them—the stage drivers and shotgun messengers and the Pony Express riders—had traveled weary, dangerous, lonely miles bringing Westerners all they needed to survive. Thanks to the expressmen, the West was now united and linked indissolubly to the East. When the railroad came the expressmen knew that their strenuous era was near an end, and they were a little sad to see it go. In the saloons of San Francisco, trail-hardened veterans sang in whiskey-hoarse voices, "Farewell to romance. The old days are gone, we shall not see them like again."

The many facades of Wells, Fargo

The rapid conveyance of people, documents and precious metals underwent a startling metamorphosis as the West matured. In just over two decades, the deeds of larger-than-life-expressmen like Alexander Todd, Hank Monk and Ben Holladay gave way to the sober-sided responsibility of a sprawling corporation. Pursuing the business of minding other people's property, the Wells, Fargo express company shaped a new kind

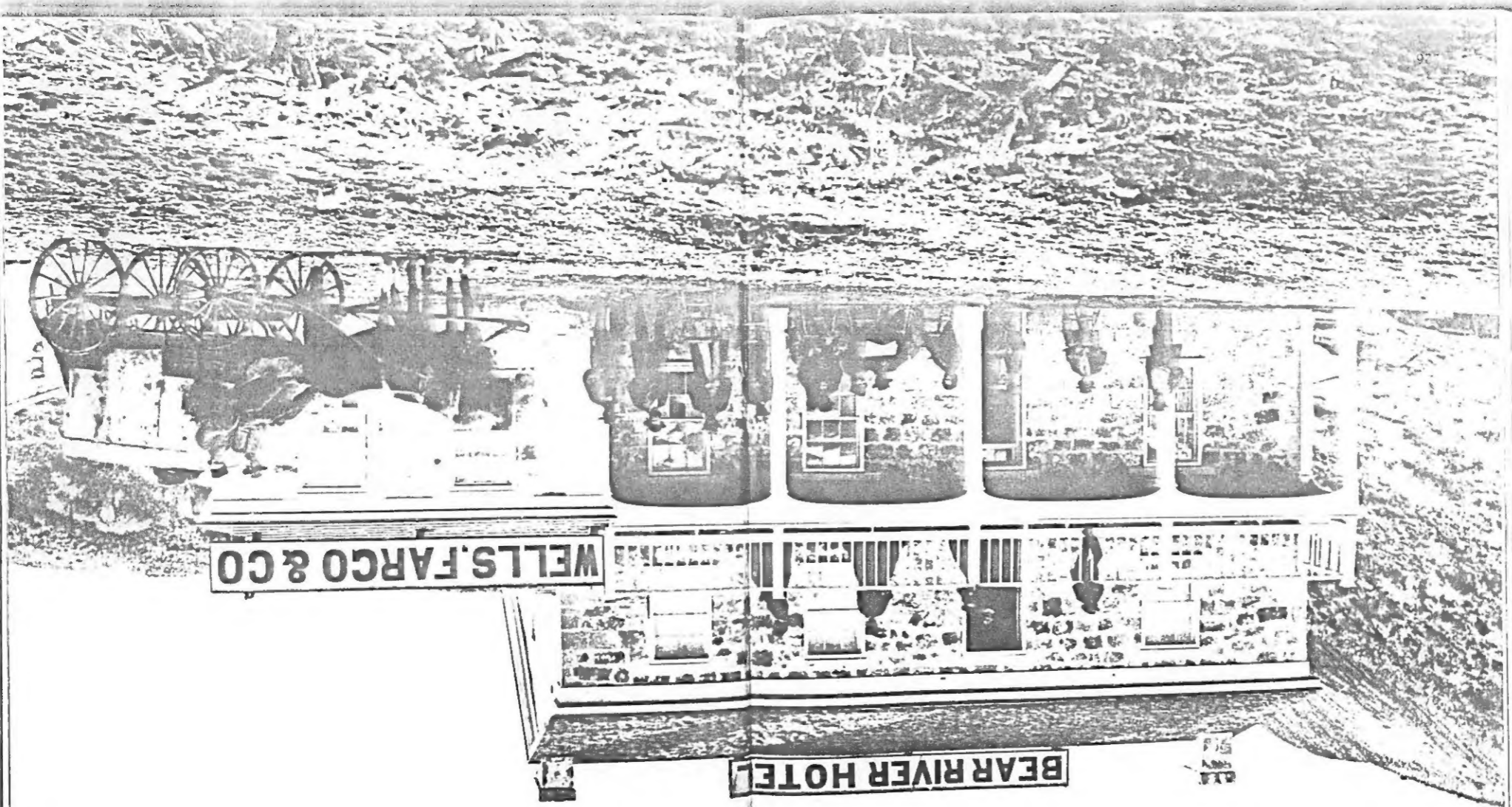
of West in its own image. As quickly as restless and adventurous men moved on and found ways to extract new wealth from mine, farm, forest or river, Wells, Fargo joined them to take reliable charge of the proceeds. In hundreds of towns this one company's arrival to do business was taken as proof of stability and permanence.

In the years that followed the opening of its first office in San Francisco in

1852, the company extended its aegis into every corner of the West. By 1893, Wells, Fargo was making deliveries over a total of 37,766 miles of express routes, and the corporation operated 2,829 branch offices—each of which was the center of commercial life in its area. Through prosperity and panic, boom and bust, Wells, Fargo was there—everywhere—to serve the new West it had helped so much to create.

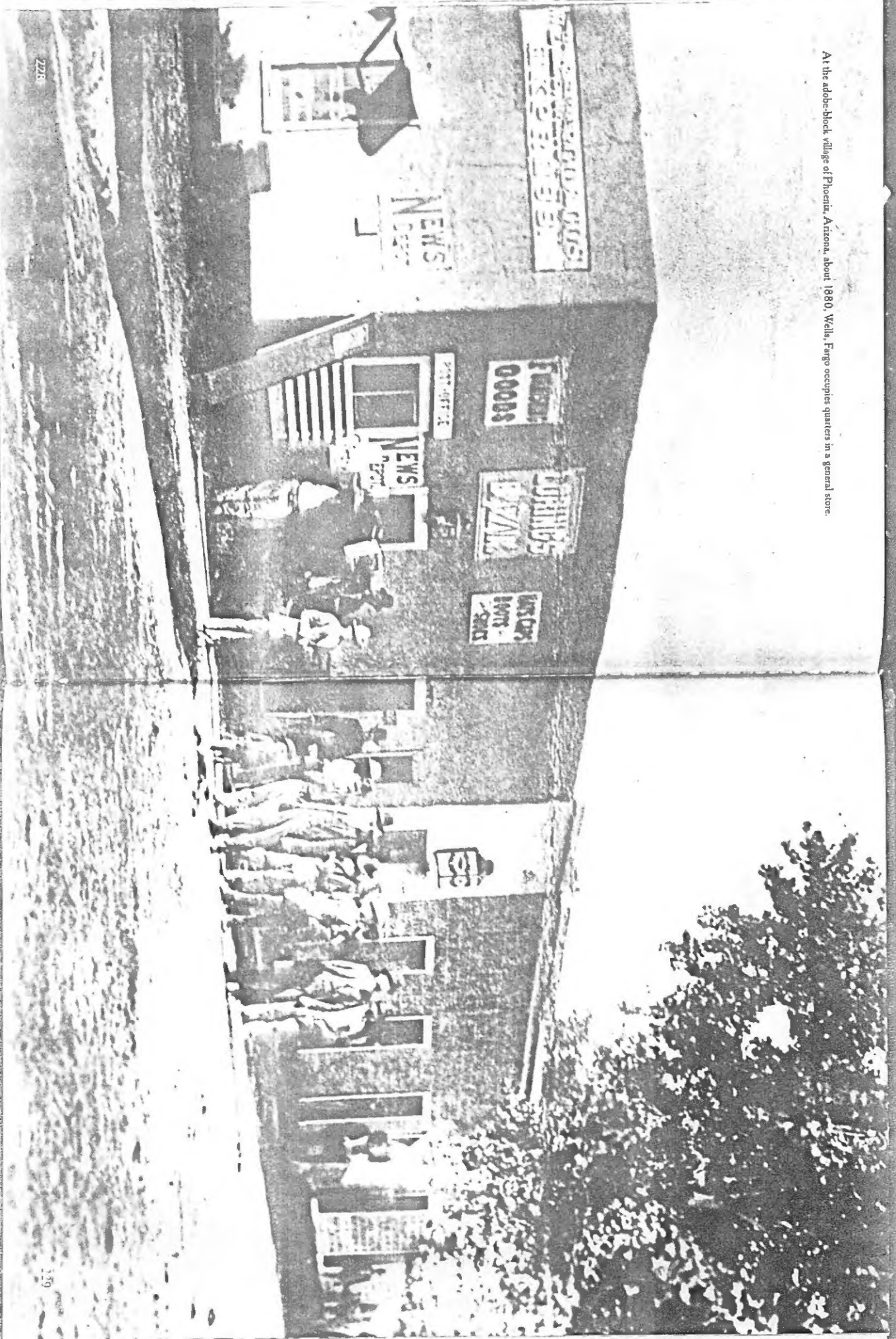
A knot of hairy customers congregate in front of the Wells, Fargo office in Portland in 1852.



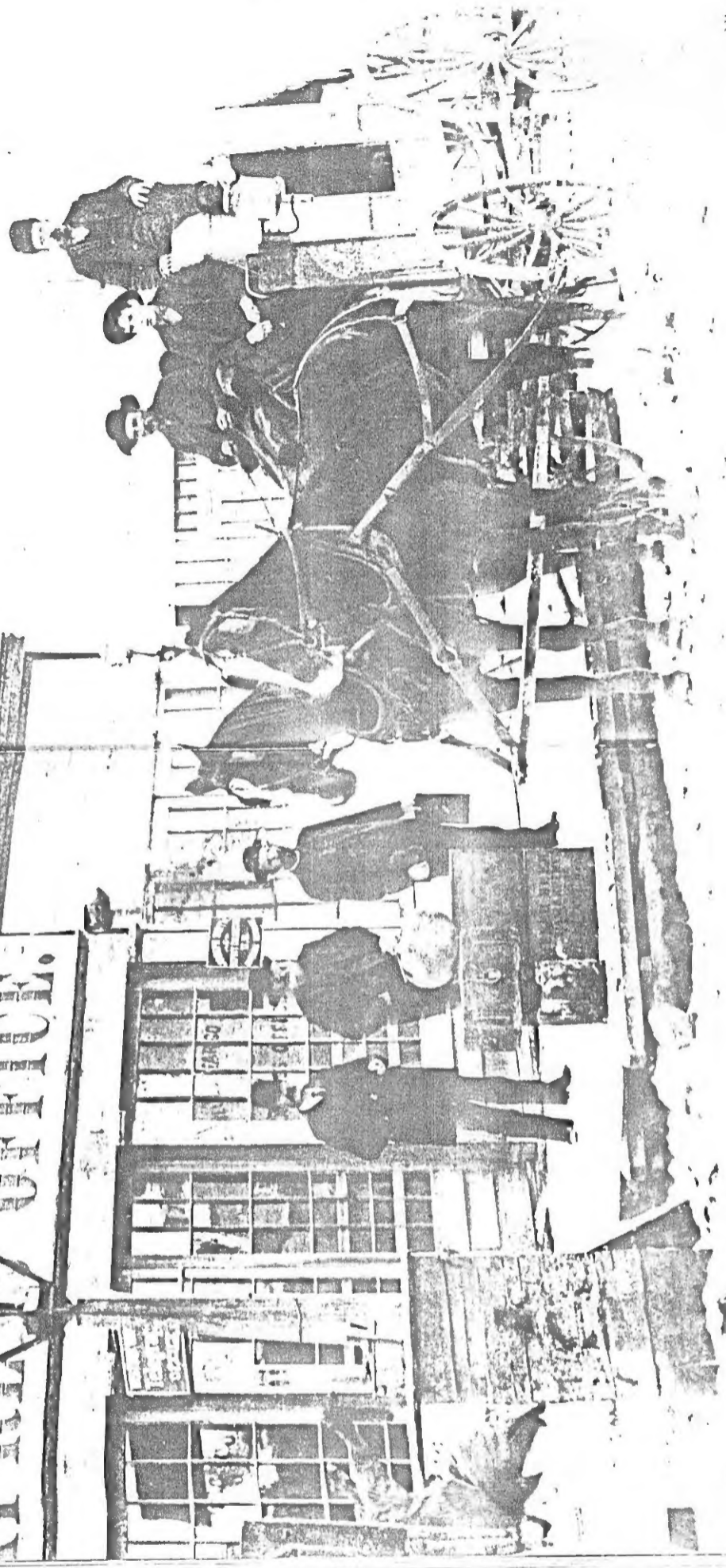


At the California gold town of Applegate—named for the owner of this hotel—a celtic stagecoach pulls up to the Wells, Fargo agency.

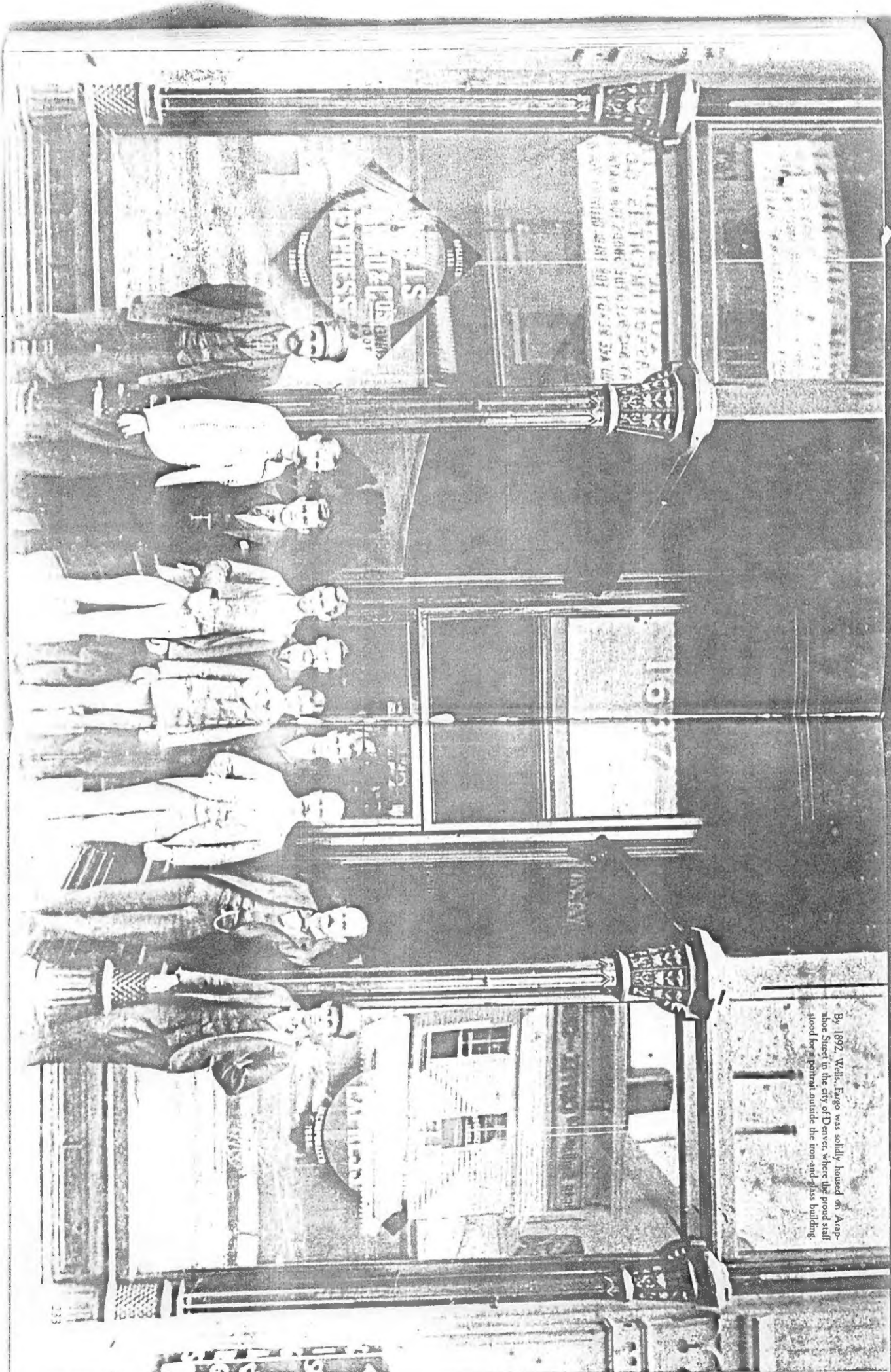
At the adobe-block village of Phoenix, Arizona, about 1880. Wells, Fargo occupies quarters in a general store.



FARGO & CO. TRANSFER AND TRUCK OFFICE.



Passengers wait at the Wells, Fargo office as a stagecoach halts on the snowy main street of Virginia City, Montana.



By 1892, Wells Fargo was solidly housed on Arapahoe Street in the city of Denver, where the proud staff stood for a portrait outside the iron and glass building.